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BOB BURDEN INTERVIEW
FLAMING CARROT
A CHAT WITH THE MADCAP CREATOR
BILL MARKS
PUBLISHING IN THE FAST LANE
SPIDEY'S NEW SCRIPTER
J. MARC DeMATTEIS
WHAT'S IN THE WORKS FOR OL' WEB-HEAD?
#40
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW
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M·I·C·R·A
MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON
SHE COULD SAVE AMERICA—
OR DESTROY IT!
THE MOST TERRIFYING
WEAPON EVER CREATED...
COMICS INTERVIEW
PUBLICATION
© TED BOONTHANAKIT

If you like ELFQUEST, you're bound to enjoy MICRA--a new bi-monthly comic book. This 12-issue limited series forms a science fiction novel of epic proportions, clearly told with sensitive writing by Lamar Waldron and beautiful art by Ted Boonthanakit. In MICRA, you won't find superheroes or characters based on toys--just fascinating men and women caught up in a complex, dangerous world.

Here's what DON THOMPSON, Editor of the Comics Buyers' Guide, said about MICRA:

"Lamar has created a detailed future world, built on present-day trends, in which the upper castes of society live in pollution-free domed cities while the rebellious lower castes live outside, amid the hazardous wastes of modern man. The heroine, a spoiled, rich, young woman, is crippled in a terrorist attack and is given the opportunity to be useful by controlling an experimental MInd Controlled Remote Automaton, a powerful robotic duplicate.

"There is an awful lot more to it than that, including several subplots only hinted at in the first issue, but you should discover those joys for yourself. I heartily recommend it."

STAN LEE, the most popular comics writer in history, says:

"I think the story's terrific! It reads like a movie. I usually haven't the time or patience to wade through these things, but I read every word of MICRA! It's a really good job. Excelsior!"

Like ELFQUEST, MICRA has won praise from authors outside comics, like RAY BRADBURY. Now's the time you should try MICRA, while you can start from the beginning.

MICRA #2 is on sale now. MICRA #1 may still be available in some areas. But don't worry--if you can't find the first issue, we've included a complete recap in MICRA #2.

The cover of MICRA #3, which ships the last week of January

MICRA

MIND CONTROLLED REMOTE AUTOMATON

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David Anthony Kraft's **COMICS INTERVIEW #46 1986.** **Published monthly by Fictioneer Books Ltd., Suite 301, 234 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10001. Copyright© 1986 Fictioneer Books Ltd. All rights reserved.** **SUBSCRIPTIONS: $24 for twelve issues. CANADA, MEXICO & FOREIGN ($2.5. funds only): $30 for twelve. Any statements made in this magazine, express or implied, are solely those of the individuals being interviewed and do *not* represent the editorial position of the publisher, who accepts no responsibility for such statements.**

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UP FRONT

Dear Bob Burden:

It would be a crime for me to have laughed so hard and enjoyed a comic so much and not let you know my feelings.

Back when I scripted THE DEFENDERS for Marvel — lo! those many years ago — I occasionally allowed my own weird sense of humor to show. The "Defender for a Day" storyline in #s 62-64, for example. Reactions to offbeat humor in comics are never offhand — in the case of the aforementioned trilogy, readers were either wildly enthusiastic or absolutely and *very* utterably appalled.

So I sympathize with the (*ahem*) burden you may have to bear, but for the record — I already count FLAMING CARROT as one of my favorite comics! The art appeals to me, especially the actual appearance of the title character, which reminds me in some strange way of early **Kirby** issues of THOR (maybe it's the resemblance of the carrot head to a gnarled staff of yore). And the casual, tossed-off asides ("His ears come off!" and "The smarter he got — the more he drank!") are precious. The villains are perfect (the Puppet Monster Man and the Man Who Walks Backwards, indeed).

There is easily a laugh a page. Let's face it — FLAMING CARROT is flat-out funny. Maybe we can even spotlight him in COMICS INTERVIEW one of these days as a delightful counterpoint to some of the more serious superhero sorts.

Here's wishing you many happy issues — and, in closing, let me just say: "Oh no, not the fish!"

Cordially,

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"Believe me, no one's gonna want to jerk

ECW Ay 1985 ©

J. MARC DeMATTEIS

In the first part of the ultimate J. Marc DeMatteis interview, interrogator Jim Salicrup grilled Marc about his early scripting days at DC — where he created such memorable characters as the Creature Commandos.

In the second part of the ultimate J. Marc DeMatteis interview, he told of his experiences adapting to the Marvel style of writing, his ambivalence toward writing superheroes, and his continued passion for vampires.

In this concluding installment, Marc reveals more about his Epic experiment, MOONSHADOW, his feelings about Star Comics, classic literature, how he got Ray Bradbury to cough up a cover-quality quote, some of his feelings and plans on writing Spider-Man and (of course) much more...

JIM SALICRUP: *Jay Muth's art is more illustrative than sequential.*

J. MARC DeMATTEIS: That's true. It brings out a whole different way of writing. I'm writing it and the pictures are kind of playing off it, you know. They're playing off each other. I think it's become more evident as the series has progressed: If we feel a certain segment of the story comes along where we have to do panel-by-panel sequential comics, we'll do that. But it brings out a different voice in me when we do it the other way; and it milks what Jay does best, the type of illustration that Jay does best. You see, regular comics, even at their best, it's a shorthand. It's very difficult to explore things in depth. To give something the texture of a novel. With MOONSHADOW, if we want to stop and explore a character's feelings, explore a given situation, in depth... we'll slow down... we'll have three pages where the copy takes center stage and the illustration becomes minimal. Just as, in any comic, you'll see a segment where the art takes center stage and the copy becomes minimal Who says it can't be the other way? And, if sometimes it looks like illustrated fiction, *so what?* Those illustrations bring another level of depth to the material. Jay's art illuminates the words in a unique way. The thing that Jay and I feel is most important for us with MOONSHADOW — and the reason that, despite that early flak, we feel we're so lucky to be working for Epic and with people like **Margaret Clark**, and **Jo Duffy**, and **Archie Goodwin** — is that we don't want to play by *anybody's* rules. We want to throw the rules out the window and do it *our* way. And, at Epic, we're not only

off to an issue of MOONSHADOW."

© 1985 by J. M. DeMatteis and Jon J Muth

allowed to do that... we're encouraged... we're supported. Because they've seen that we know what we're doing. That we can be trusted to experiment and produce work that is of superior quality. I don't think I have to justify that statement. Just as I've been able to list dozens of stories of mine that I can clearly say sucked, I can say, with equal confidence, that MOONSHADOW is superior work. Even if nobody else liked it, Jay and I knew, from the start, that we were doing something that we both could be proud of. The fact that the response has been so good, especially within the industry, has been an added bonus. Not everyone feels that way, of course... I mean, I've gotten some comments from some people that it just doesn't look or read like a a regular comic. "I didn't know what to make of it." Well, relax and enjoy it. The flip side of that is that, you know, the people that I give it to who are not comics people and don't have that mind-set gobble it up. Before, friends of mine that read my comics read them, you know, 'cause they're my friends and they'll read it because I'm standing there going, "Cone on, read this story." And they go, "Hey, that's pretty good for a comic book." Their response to MOONSHADOW was like, "This is really good! What's gonna happen next?" And my problem is that I think *that's* the audience they have to try and reach. I think, you know, there are certainly people within whatever the nebulous thing called comic-book fandom that's out there that are reading it and appreciating it — I know, I've met them at conventions and comics shops, and it's very gratifying — but there's a big audience of people like you and me, of our age, who grew up with all those same influences that affect the characters in the story. I think, you know, that the same person who would walk into a bookstore and pick up a **Vonnegut** or **John Irving** novel would want to read MOONSHADOW if it were presented to them in the right way.

I think the other problem, which **Jack Harris** brought up to me years ago, is this standard comic book format — that square little thing that we're all used to, that people grew up with. It's gonna take a lot for people to perceive that as anything other than a dumb old comic book. Even MOONSHADOW; the same story done in a graphic novel format might be appreciated in a different way, you know. It might be viewed in a different way. But so many people have this mind-set about comics. They see a comic book in that square shape and size and they may be surprised by its glossy paper but it's still in that format. I was out in California a couple of months ago and there was a front-page story in the L.A. TIMES about comics in France and how the President of France reads comics — how these graphic albums are for adults and it's accepted and this and that.

It's all in the presentation. It's the mind-set. Something definitely has to be changed, you know. What should be happening is there should be ads for MOONSHADOW in ROLLING STONE. We should be aggressively seeking out that audience. Which is not to put aside the other comics audience but, we need to step over those lines in terms of marketing and distribution, just as we're stepping over lines with the material. I think something like the Epic line where you've got, you know, each book with its individual creator and supposedly with an individual and unique point of view... the way to market that, then, is not in one flat generic way. You've got to look at each book and say, "How do we market this book best? How do we reach the audience that is best for this book?" I think if comics are gonna grow up and if we're really ever gonna have adult comics, which is what we're trying to do — whether we will succeed or not we'll figure out in the end — the whole approach has to change. The marketing approach has to change. The whole attitude

MOONSHADOW #3 in which a rape scene was deleted.

"You can't say 'fuck' and Ira says 'fuck.'"

has to change. And we can't be scared and roll over when someone gets offended by one thing. You just can't.

JIM: *Well, have they?*

MARC: What?

JIM: *Well, what has the reaction been?*

MARC: Well, not to change my approach . . . but, in the beginning, we went through some things. For one thing, as a result of that initial flak, all the Epic Comics started going through **Shooter** to be checked for "content."

JIM: *What does that mean?*

MARC: Meaning they want to make sure there's nothing that's going to go *too* far. Which was scary at first, but the reality has been that no one's jumped on us about too many things. I mean, basically, we really have creative freedom. About the only thing we can't say, for some idiotic reason or another, is "fuck." Basically, any changes they want are requested of us. The material is creator-owned; they can't force us into anything. Of course they *can* cancel the book, I suppose. *(Laughter.)* But that hasn't been the case. But "fuck" has been a problem. You can't say "fuck" and Ira says "fuck" all the time. So, every time I write Ira's dialogue, if he says "fuck" I put it in and they'll take it out later, y'know. *(Laughter.)* I feel like I have to put it in 'cause that's the way he talks, y'know — and, if all they're gonna bug us about is "fuck," then it's okay with me. Because, so far, "fuck" hasn't been important. We may come up to a point where it *is* important to the story . . . really important . . . and then we'll start fighting about it . . . in a very civilized manner, of course. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Have you ever refused a change?*

MARC: Yes . . . several times Margaret has called and said, "Well, we think this should be changed . . . it's a little too . . ." And I've said, "No, it's important, I won't change it."

JIM: *And what happened?*

MARC: Nothing. The book went out the way I wrote it. By the same token there have been some occasions where I've said, "okay, it really doesn't make any great difference." And there was one time . . . Y'see, right after that initial flap about the masturbation scene, we had trouble with a scene in issue #3 where Ira rapes a prostitute.

ANN NOCENTI: *(Groan.)*

MARC: Which is the whole point, see. He's not a cute, funny sidekick. He's a sleazy, disgusting, disturbed creature. Anyway, I was so concerned about all the uproar about that first thing, that I kind of wrote the copy in a light tone to play off what was happening. **Kevin Nowlan** — whose lettering on the book has been so important to its success — Kevin made a little note that said something like: "Is anybody bothered that this character is committing rape to get a laugh?" Which wasn't the point at all, y'know. It wasn't. But I could see how it could be interpreted that way. So Archie felt very uncomfortable about that and it went back and forth, several rewrites — I was on the phone with **Laurie Sutton**, who was our editor then, all day long — and it ultimately came down

GAZE UPON ME, ONCE-FRIENDS-- GAZE WITH HORROR UPON THE REBORN HELLCAT!
AVARRISH IS IN ME--AND I IN HIM! TOGETHER WE SHALL WALK THIS EARTH 'TILL TIME'S END--

Hellcat's diabolical transformation in THE DEFENDERS #94.

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"We want to throw the rules out..."

© 1986 by MCG

Marc is once again writing Spider-Man. Pencils by Mike Zeck.

to the fact that they didn't want the rape in there altogether. So I changed it. Well, I was pissed off — but I did it, because, ultimately, it didn't make or break the issue... it wasn't of supreme — or, in the end, even *minor* — importance. In or out, the story was the same. In fact, issue #3 is one of my real favorites so far. But the point is, I think people were a little scared, a little paranoid after that first incident. And I can understand that. This is the publishing business and Marvel is, as someone said to me, kind of like **Disney**, you know. Maybe they just shouldn't have the Marvel name on Epic Comics. Separate it some more. But the interesting thing to me is that, as time has passed, there have been no problems. The book is labelled *"For Mature Readers"* in all the material that's sent out to the distributors... and we've had very few problems. In fact, Margaret's told me that **Shooter**, on several occasions, has looked at questionable — questionable for *comics* — lines and said, "Hey — we've labelled it properly, so let it go out." And the proof of the pudding for me is that MOONSHADOW has become a book that people at Marvel are very *proud* of. **Shooter** likes to go to conventions and say "Hey, here's a book that may not be selling, but we're proud of it. It's quality work." Marvel's not trying to sweep it under the rug. We could sure use some better *promotion*, but that's another story... *(Laughter.)* Look at GREENBERG... There was some stuff in GREENBERG that went farther than anything we've done in MOONSHADOW, I think. And **Shooter** read it and understood what we were trying to do and went to **Mike Hobson** and explained it to him and out it went... I think that says something. It was labelled, people were warned: "Here comes another one of **De Matteis**' dirty books!" *(Laughter.)* But what really delighted me was the fact that **Jim Galton** read the GREENBERG graphic novel... this is the president of the company!... and he loved it. He was very impressed with it. And so for everyone out there who loves to paint the people at Marvel as a big bunch of repressive morons, I'm sorry, I can't agree. It ain't a perfect company... Lord knows, I've had my share of major problems... **Shooter** and I, I think, are often at totally opposite ends of the spectrum creatively speaking... but the bottom line is these people have gone to the wall to back material that is really out there. And they deserve a lot of credit for that. A *lot* of credit. Now if they could only *sell* it. *(Laughter.)*

Greenberg the Vampire, one of Marc's most fascinating characters.

JIM: *That's interesting. You've mentioned that they're labelling the work — and that doesn't seem to bother you...*

MARC: Well, on one level, it doesn't bother me. Not in the least. If it means I can do MOONSHADOW and GREENBERG, go right ahead, label it. But, on the other hand, there'll still be complaints. In fact, the labels themselves might draw attention from people who might never have noticed it otherwise. My big nightmare is **Jerry Falwell** walking into a comic shop and... On the other hand, it could all pay off. Back when the infamous "masturbation controversy" was brewing, I was down here visiting and I went into a comic shop in Brooklyn and as soon as word got out that this was...

JIM: *People are looking for the dirty part.*

MARC: Exactly. They said they couldn't sell them fast enough. The first issue was selling strong for the whole two months before the second issue came out. They had a big stack on the counter and they just kept selling them. Well, the word was out. It got translated from "accepting returns" to "the book is recalled" — as if you could recall a comic book like you could recall

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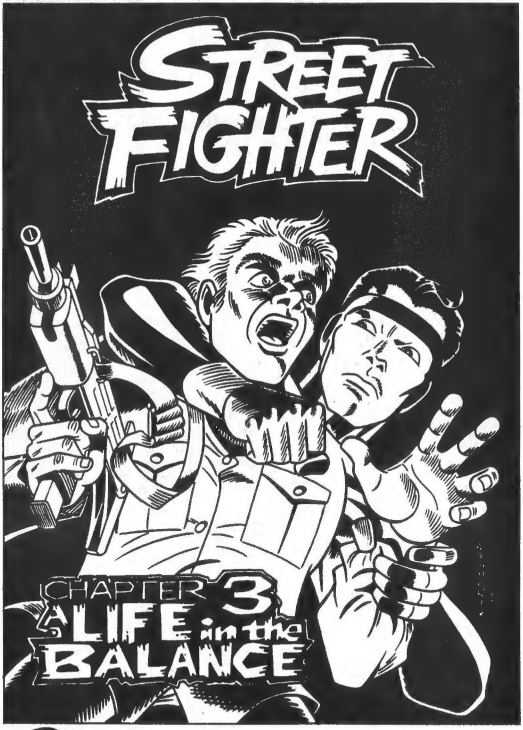
COMING THIS FEBRUARY



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OCEAN COMICS

"the new wave in quality"

"The Star stuff, they're joke books..."

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a car. *(Laughter.)* So they jacked up the price a half-a-buck and they were selling lots of them, you know If that's the way we're gonna get people to read the book, fine, then maybe a little controversy.

JIM: *Do you know if they received returns?*

MARC: From what I've heard, the re-orders made up for the returns. The first issue sold out. I know there was one major distributor who refused after the first issue, after receiving it, who started the uproar — he shall remain nameless — who I assume must have returned whatever he received because he was so offended by it. And what I'm offended by is that this *one* guy who services a number of states can now prevent all of those comic shops from selling MOONSHADOW by not carrying the book.

MIKE CARLIN: It was a distributor?

MARC: It was a distributor.

MIKE CARLIN: Wow! That's really out of whack.

MARC: Yeah, I think it is.

JIM: *Well, I think the stores in general don't depend on just one distributor. There are a few that carry everything...*

MARC: Well, this was a pretty heavy duty distributor that services a lot of shops.

JIM: *Well, they could still order it from somebody else. If they can't get it from him they'll get it from somebody else.*

MARC: Well, I hope that's the way it works out.

JIM: *How's your working relationship with the artist?*

MARC: The best collaboration I've ever been involved in. Jay is a friend as well as collaborator, so that's kinda nice. He also lives nearby. Everything about the project I really — it's gonna sound pretentious — I feel that it's been blessed. It didn't get done until I was really able to do it. Had it been done two years before, I would have fucked it up. I wouldn't have done it as well, you know. I started at a point where I was really able to do it. **Dan Green**, another good friend, introduced me to Jay at just the right time — just when Jay was looking for something like this to do — and our friendship has grown in the course of working on the book and led to the point where our friendship is far more important than the book is. It's very unique. When we started out, I'd write a plot outline and we'd sit down with it — go out to breakfast — and we'd work on the layouts together, and he does little layouts about... I don't know... about a quarter of the size of a sheet of typing paper, whatever that is...

JIM: *So the artistic training or ambition is finally...*

MARC: Yes and no. We'd talk 'em out and Jay would draw them. Then I'd go home and write from these real small layouts. If I felt the story needed to go off into another direction... I should say if the story *told* me it needed to go off into another direction, 'cause that's really how it is... I'd throw out the layouts and do my own. Eventually, what happened... with Jay being so busy working on the previous issue and me changing things anyway... was that Jay stopped doing the layouts altogether. Now *I* do 'em — let the story direct me, not me *it*. I used to send Margaret detailed plots of every issue so she would know what was coming... but the issue always evolved so much while I was working on it that I eventually stopped doing that. Now I send her a general outline of several issues — and let the story go where it will. Anyway, I give my layouts back to Jay, along with the complete script... when I say layouts, realize that I draw like, I don't know, **Don Martin** if he was drunk, weird little cartoon scribbles. I give the layouts to Jay and he translates these mishmash drawings into real art and changes whatever he wants to change. I basically tell him: "Interpret this however you choose, just don't contradict the copy and stay true to the spirit of the story." So then he brings *his* vision to mine. I mean, sometimes I'll leave a page *blank* — or a couple of panels blank — and just give him the copy. "Here, give me something here." We trust each other. It's

"Stan Lee petered out into the comic

Pour le salut de l'humanité et celui de nos êtres immortels, nous devons relever le défi!
Mes amis, nous n'avons pas le choix.
AFE
D'accord docteur!
Nous le pensons aussi.
Nous sommes d'accord...
Nous devons immédiatement nous rendre sur celles de Battle d'Argrad de Clea et de Valkyrie.
... ne laissant que Dalmun seul avec sa rage et son désarroi...
... pour des autres...
Je sais, Damon. Pourquoi...
Simple parce que nous devons avoir une conversation entre père et fils.
Salon orlate d'un rire démoniaque.
La Chute a eu moins besoin...
Quant au fils de Satan, haute!

The Defenders in French. Printing quality of the foreign editions is generally superior to the American original. And the retail cost is cheaper.

kind of — and it's an overused word — organic. It's a very special collaboration for me, and a very special friendship. I don't think you're gonna find a better looking comic anywhere. Jay is like — I really mean it — it's not me boasting — I didn't say better written or anything — I'm boasting about Jay — he's an extraordinarily gifted artist. He writes. He's a musician. He's an actor. He does all this stuff and he's only 25. Very depressing.

MIKE SOMEBODY: I'm glad 25 is young

MARC: Well, now that I'm 32, 25 is young.

JIM SALICRUP : *Does Jay Muth have any input into the MOONSHADOW story?*

J. MARC DeMATTEIS: No. Not really. The story all comes out of me. He's added a few touches. Frodo was originally supposed to be a sheepdog... Jay wanted to draw a cat, so he became a cat... and Jay's sort of made Frodo his own. But this is my madness. How could Jay write my madness, you know? What he does is intrepret and layer things in. The most important contribution he's made as far as I'm concerned is that he helped me find the *voice* for the book. I originally intended to give it a dryer, harder edge. Then I looked at that beautiful Victorian-looking art and suddenly it came to me. Old Moonshadow started whispering in my ear. I heard the voice. And that came from my reacting to Jay's early artwork. For that I'll be forever grateful. But, as I said, this is *my* madness. These are *my* obsessions. I wouldn't wish them on anybody else. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *How far have you sort of directed the story*

MARC: Oh, I had it all. I knew where it all was going before we ever started.

JIM: *Is there an end?*

MARC: Yeah. It's a twelve-issue series, which a lot of people don't seem to know either — which somehow says a lot about promotion. *(Laughter.)* Well, it's true, you know, that people don't know. Now they're finding out it's a limited series.

My approach is that it's a novel in comic book format — so before we started it I knew what was happening to the characters. I had the structure for the whole novel. I knew where it was going and I knew exactly how it was ending. The fun is, along the way, and within the context of that structure, all these things and characters pop up that I never knew were gonna exist and carry over, and things change and evolve within the structure. But the structure has been there from the very beginning, you know. I'm not gonna have to make up the ending at the time I get to issue #12. The ending is one of the first things that I had, you know.

JIM: *Well, you mentioned you like Gerber's work. I knew Gerber at the time and it was heavily autobiographical, and he worked a lot of the people he knew into it.*

MIKE CARLIN: You never knew Gerber was a duck did you? *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *MOONSHADOW is a book that seems that way also.*

MARC: Yeah. It is. I mean, basically, the idea was to take — the original idea, obviously, it's grown way beyond that now — was to take two years of my life and then translate it, funnel it through my brain and translate it into this fantasy universe, which is what I did. That's the fun of it for me, too — all of this Brooklyn stuff that kind of seeps in and out, the Brooklyn flashbacks and all. Again, the approach is this is what I'd be writing if I could have done this as a screenplay or as a novel, whatever. We just happen to be doing this as a comic and approaching it as a real piece of writing. So it's all me. Before it was like, "Well how do I funnel my point of view or my life or whatever through Captain America?"

JIM: *Right.*

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book equivalent of Paul McCartney."

© 1988 by MCG

MARC: Which is hard to do through Captain America. *(Laughter.)* Or the Defenders. Or whatever. Whereas now I don't have to funnel it through anything 'cause this is pure . . .

JIM: *Well, one could argue that instead you're adding all this fantasy work . . .*

MARC: Well, now, I always felt like the fantasy elements were often the best way to translate reality.

JIM: *You wouldn't want to do a story like, say, I don't know . . . AMERICAN SPENDOR, which was totally grounded in . . .*

MARC: Oh, I absolutely *do*. AMERICAN SPENDOR is brilliant, by the way. I think everyone reading this should run out and buy it. It will nourish your soul. Anyway, the kind of stuff I like is the really great mainstream literature. The stuff that kind of peels reality back anyway, even though it's called "mainstream" or whatever. It's not fantasy or science-fiction, but if you read **Dostoyevsky** you find he sees into reality so deeply that it becomes fantastic anyway. All of this stuff's gonna sound real pretentious in print, but reality is fantastic. If you really look at life with opened eyes it's really strange and miraculous, and sometimes the best way to grasp that grangeness is by telling a fantasy story because maybe that's the way I perceive life, you know. And the same thing . . . You read **Dostoyevsky** or you read **Melville** — I'm really into **Isaac Bashevis Singer** now, who's terrific — **Knut Hamsun** and all of these guys, and there's a very fantastic view of the universe. They're telling "real" stories, you know, but I think — it's been my experience, anyway — the deeper you look into reality the more fantastic it becomes. This is why you can sometimes apprehend reality better through a fantasy story than you can through a "realistic" story. But, yeah, I have plenty of "realistic" stories that I want to tell as well. This is exactly what I talked about in that final "prose section" of the GREENBERG graphic novel . . . the line between "realistic" fiction and "fantasy" fiction and where they meet.

JIM: *So where does GREENBERG fit in?*

MARC: Well, again, the vampire aspect gives you a mobility to illuminate that quest for salvation and redemption and all that — all the other cliches that are true and haunt my life. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *What other projects do you have simmering around?*

MARC: The DOCTOR STRANGE graphic novel is finally finished and coming out.

JIM: *Who's drawing that?*

MARC: **Dan Green** is *painting* it, and anyone who knows Dan's work just from his inking is going to be very surprised by the work that he's doing. He's far more than just an inker . . . however good. Painting in comics, American comics, has come in vogue over the last couple of years, you know, and there are guys who know how to do it and there are some guys who have tried it who really haven't known how to do it. **Dan** and **Jay** and **Kent Williams** were painters before they ever got into comics, you know, and they really have that sensibility. Dan's work on the graphic novel is real, real special. We set out with DOCTOR STRANGE to basically do a graphic novel that we thought would be worth your $5.95, you know. A lot of the stuff that you see that comes out is like comic books on a high grade of paper. It could have been an annual last year but they put it on a high grade of paper and charged you six bucks for it, and I think that's a rip-off.

Marc wrote this stunning DOCTOR STRANGE graphic novel illustrated by Dan Green.

JIM: *Well I hope MARVEL AGE is worth the 50¢.*

MARC: It certainly is. *(Laughter.)* I get mine for free so I don't care. We wanted to sit down — the same thing with GREENBERG — and do something that would take advantage of the format and really be worth it. Hopefully — that's why I keep talking about DOCTOR STRANGE and GREENBERG — even if these kinds of projects don't succeed, they'll be interesting failures. I think they'll be more interesting as failures than a lot of the "successes" have been. I would rather take a risk and fail interestingly. Like I said, I got to the point where I said I don't want to do the bullshit anymore. I want to make

J. MARC DeMATTEIS

"Marvel is kind of like Disney."

A SIGH! GOOD WORK, MORRIE! THIS CRAZY DIVERSION OF YOURS SAVED OUR TAILS!
ONE MOVE, LESLIE -- JUST ONE MOVE -- AND I'LL BREAK YOUR NECK!

Greenberg's bizarre adventure with Mr. X and a cult reaches its climax.

sure that everything that I'm working on is something really special, something that I'm committed to. MOONSHADOW has spoiled me, you know, 'cause I sit down to work on that and I do a certain level of work and a certain type of work and I want it to feed back into everything else then, you know.

JIM: *Well, one thing you said earlier was that when you did the Greenberg story for BIZARRE ADVENTURES, it was equally hard but the reaction was completely different. Is it equally hard?*

MARC: Well, when it reached MOONSHADOW it became a different story altogether. I mean, I could sit down and write for CAPTAIN AMERICA and very comfortably write six to ten pages in a day. I have written up to six pages in a day on MOONSHADOW, but the average is more like *two* pages a day. I have the luxury of sitting there and writing the same page twenty times if I have to, until it satisfies me — and as **Margaret Clark** will tell you, after the script is in I still sit at home and reread them. I'm always sending in revisions, and revisions of the revisions, and revisions of the revisions of the revisions.

MIKE HIGGINS: Can't you get it right the first time?

MARC: Luckily, we have the leeway with the time. We're far enough ahead that we can do that. In the first issue we took a good six or eight months to finish the work. On the monthly, mainstream books it gets to a certain point where it's gotta be in. No matter how you cut it, it's gotta be in. You learn to be good within the parameters of that time, but it's much bettér to have the luxury, you know, and to have the time to really work it over and really be able to write. I think there's often a difference between writing and comic book writing. There are a lot of good writers in comics, and there are also a lot of people who I think are good storytellers but I would not call them writers, you know. I think there's a big difference between the two, if that makes sense.

JIM: *Yeah, I agree with that.*

MARC: One of the reasons I don't read too many comic books anymore, you know, is I just feel like if I'm gonna be reading let me absorb something that's really good, that's gonna feed me as a writer and make me better. I like to keep up with what's going on in comics, but for the most part, I don't feel like I'm gonna learn anything that's gonna help me become a better writer at this point in my career.

JIM: *How did you arrive at the stuff you are reading now? What are you reading now in terms of books?*

MARC: I've been winding through THE COLLECTED STORIES by **Isaac Bashevis Singer**, WORLDS OF WONDER by **Robertson Davies**. GOD SPEAKS by **Meher Baba**. Every time I want to take a breath and read something light, I'll read one of **Baum's** OZ books. What else? CIDER HOUSE RULES by **John Irving**. GREAT EXPECTATIONS. A lot of stuff.

JIM: *Well, let me just ask, was it because of your interest in researching . . .*

MARC: Oh, no. Not at all. I mean, again, my love of those great books I grew up with, my love of literature, that comes from *me* and goes into the series, not vice versa. There have been some cases where it's been reversed. MOONSHADOW has brought me to **Charles Dickens**. I read DAVID COPPERFIELD when I was in high school, loved it . . . but that was the only **Dickens** I'd ever read. When I started MOONSHADOW, I did some consciously **Dickens**ian things . . . y'know, doing the chapters "I Am Born," that kind of thing. But there wasn't, at least consciously, a heavy **Dickens** influence. But everyone, from Jay right at the start, who picked up on it and started drawing it that way, to **Jo Duffy** and lots of people, started with this, "Oh, yeah. It's **Dickens** on acid." *(Laughter.)* So around issue #3 or so, I reread DAVID COPPERFIELD for the first time in fifteen or so years and I was blown away. I mentioned how I struggled to find the right voice for this book. Just the proper tone and feel. And there it is! I saw so many similarities . . . Anyway, I've been gobbling **Dickens** up ever since. I've learned more about the novel by reading him than . . . It's interesting, too, because there's a very clear link between **Dickens** and **John Irving**, who's one of my favorite contemporary writers, and someone else who really knows how to use the novel in the grand old sense. Another thing that MOONSHADOW's done is to get me deeply into children's literature. I've got a five year old

The murderous Mr. X meets the reason for his killings. From the first Greenberg the Vampire story, BIZARRE ADVENTURES #29.

© 1981 by MCO

"They didn't want the rape in there..."

© 1986 by J. M. DeMatteis and Jon J Muth

son, so that helps, too, of course. Thanks to **Cody**, I've rediscovered one of the great loves of my life, **Dr. Seuss** — and the **Dr. Seuss** influence is clearly there in MOONSHADOW. But, because of the tone of the book, because Moon's been influenced by some of these children's classics, which I *hadn't* read, I started picking up on these things more and more. The OZ books, PETER PAN...

JIM: *You say that Moon's been influenced by...*

MARC: Well, I really think of him as a separate entity, you know. We share a lot, but he's someone else. He's this old man who's whispering in my ear telling me the story of his life. Which is why I'm often surprised. He's a very playful old man and I never know what he's gonna pull next. But, anyway, I've been reading these children's books...**Madeleine L'Engle** who, for me, is the paradigm for this material... her work just blew me away. And the best children's material is written with such sophistication and wit, so much purity and wonder — and darkness, too — that it will enchant, totally enchant, a ten year old and also appeal to an adult. Which is something this medium could afford to do...

JIM: *Well, there are the Star comics...*

MARC: Yeah. And I hope they keep trying. I'm glad they're out there. But this is, first and foremost, a children's medium, and what we've got... The Star stuff, they're joke books...they're fun, but... For the most part, we've neglected the fact that we're producing material for children. Just as we should strive to produce truly adult material, we should strive to produce material that is, in the classic sense, for children. There isn't much...maybe not anything...like that out there. What we've got is this material that is neither for children nor adults. I was a guilty of it as anyone. We've got superheroes, these wonderful, god-like figures that children are knocked out by, and we're forcing these...trying to force...these adult concepts into the stories. And what we've ended up with are books that are neither for children nor adults.

JIM: *Then who are they for?*

MARC: I don't know. Adolescents. Adults who don't want to let go of their adolescence. Immature twenty-one year olds.

JIM: *Are you saying that the audience is...*

MARC: Obviously, I'm exaggerating to make a point. Our audience is shrinking and will continue to shrink until we stop doing these pseudo-adult things and start producing work for children *and* adults. Not these hybrids that satisfy neither. I've got a project in the works at DC that Karen Berger is editing. It's called THE STARDUST KID — and it'll be a six-issue series. A six-issue novel. And it's my attempt to do a children's book, in the classic sense. A book full of wonder that a ten year old could read and be knocked out by, that an adult can pick up and be enchanted by...Not some hybrid. It's my shot at being **Madeleine L'Engle**. The way I'm telling the story is closer to the way I write MOONSHADOW...more novelistic than comic-booky...

JIM: *Who's the artist?*

MARC: At the moment, that's what's holding it up. I've written two issues, but we don't have an artist yet. This book requires a special touch. .Where did we start this from? What were we talking about?

JIM: *Your love of literature and how it fed into MOONSHADOW, I think*

MARC: Yeah. I mean, I grew up reading comics, but I wasn't one of these people who *just* read comic books. I was an English major, y'know. I always...

JIM: *Is that what led you to that? How did you wind up — and this is a strange question... In terms of promotion you were suggesting we advertise in ROLLING STONE, that might make people more aware of MOONSHADOW...*

MIKE CARLIN: Are you just reading people who you found out about in school, or what?

"I got to the point where I don't

JIM: *Well, no. I'm just trying to figure out what's . . . Even though you're working in comics you're not really reading a lot of comics. You're pursuing interests. If you weren't reading comics at all and if MOONSHADOW was out there then it seems that it would be unlikely that you would even know about it.*

MARC: I guess so.

JIM: *The most ridiculous, hypothetical . . .*

MARC: But that's true. That is true.

JIM: *What would make . . . In other words, what is getting you to read the stuff, the literature or whatever, the books, because I doubt if it's marketing? I don't think that you're seeing commercials for . . .*

MARC: . . .**Isaac Bashevis Singer**, no. I don't know. I always read, and one author always leads to another. In high school I discovered **Dostoyevsky**, who just blew me away and became, you know, my literary god. And then you hear about someone from someone else. Someone else turned me on to **Henry Miller**, and I see in **Miller** echoes of **Dostoyevsky** and a lot of the writers that I really love. **Singer** is kind of like, in his own way, the Jewish **Dostoyevsky**. I don't know. How does anyone get led through it? I always liked to read. I always loved literature. Even when I was flunking out in high school I was home reading **The Brothers Karamozov** and in college I was an English major. I just always read.

People I knew always read, and it's a network that way. Yeah, but if you look at it, what's a best-selling novel? **But**, y'know, if you think about it . . . authors would kill to get those full page ads in THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW. **Singer's** last book had an ad there . . .

JIM: *Yeah. But how many people are really reached that way?*

MARC: Well, remember, if a hardback sells 100,000 copies, it's a best seller, y'know? And then there's **PUBLISHERS WEEKLY** and those kinds of things. Kind of like the fanzines of the literary world. And, of course, there are author's tours and talk show appearances. **Phil Donahue** . . .

JIM: *But Dostoyevsky . . .*

MARC: Didn't I see Fyodor on Phil's show last week? *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Okay . . .*

MARC: I just have to plug another writer that not enough people are aware of, one who I think is just brilliant, and his name is **Par Lagerkvist**. He's a Swedish writer and he wrote BARABBAS and THE SYBIL and THE HOLY LAND and many other books. In terms of learning as a writer, I have *never* seen someone achieve that kind of simplicity and power. I mean simplicity is hard to achieve in any art, and I think all art is a movement from complexity to simplicity.

JIM: *Run that by me again.*

MARC: About art being a movement from complexity to simplicity? I think if you really follow — follow the great writers and artists — that's what it is. They simplify. You simplify and you crystallize your ideas to the point where it becomes deceptively simple. Where it's not *really* simple. **Lagerkvist**'s books started out as pretty fat books, and by the time he wrote his last books they were like 60 pages, you know. But between each word was thunder. Echoes. The power of the allegory. I read that stuff and I say, "Yes. Someday I will be a writer." **Lagerkvist**, though much of his work has historical settings, really wrote allegories. And, that, along with the fairy tale. has become a form I'm fascinated with. We'll be following MOONSHADOW up with a MOONSHADOW graphic novel — and it's gonna take the whole thing in a different direction, away from the fairy tale, science-fiction memoir and into the realm of the purely allegorical tale

JIM: *How so?*

Marc's "thing" with vampires first appeared with his "I, Vampire" series in THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY.

© 1982 by DC Comics, Inc

WRITER

want to do the bullshit anymore."

The death of the woman Gargoyle loved drives him over the brink in THE GARGOYLE Limited Series, written by Marc and illustrated by Mark Badger.

MARC: It's hard to put in words. Which is what the allegory in some ways is about, expressing that which is hard to put in words. The allegory works on symbol and suggestion and layers of meaning. But the MOONSHADOW graphic novel will follow Moonshadow through to the day he dies. And it will be a definite departure from the way we're doing it now... or else why do it, right? The same goes for BLOOD — which is a new series, a limited series, that **Kent Williams** and I are putting together for Epic. It's pure allegory. The world it takes place on is simply The World. The main character has no name, he's simply The Seeker. Everything is bare bones. Simplicity. And, hopefully, some thunder between the words

I'm trying to set some standards for myself. I want to keep reaching, no matter what I'm working on. Whether it's MOONSHADOW's unclassifiable strangeness, or the children's approach in STARDUST KID or the allegory in BLOOD. I'm terrified of doing it, y'know — I might not make it. But at least I'm setting myself a goal and saying, "Look, I want to try something like this." I think that's what comics have to do. That's also what I was writing about in the last section of the GREENBERG graphic novel Greenberg's saying, "Hey — I've been bullshitting around for years now, it's time to do something of worth. It's time to reach." Which is a challenge to myself, and it's a challenge to everyone else who's working in this business. I don't mean to sound pretentious or think that I have all the answers, 'cause there are a lot of people out there doing great work, **Frank Miller** and **Alan Moore** and **Harvey Pekar** and many more, and, after all these years, I'm finally contributing to that body of work. So believe me, I know my weaknesses and I know when I suck and I know when I'm good. But I think you... we all... have to challenge ourselves. You can't become complacent.

JIM: *It's only in retrospect that you see the flaws...*

MARC: Right, right. MOONSHADOW I will unequivocally recommend.

JIM: *Well, we don't know ten years from now.*

MARC: No, even ten years from now. Then again, maybe you're right. I hope you're right. I hope in ten years I will have grown as a writer... grown to the point where I can look back at MOONSHADOW and say, "God, I could do that so much *better* now."

JIM: *I want to get back to the marketing... For example, something which I wouldn't think would cost much —*

I mean, if you advertise in ROLLING STONE it would be a big expense.

MARC: Yeah.

JIM: *...for example, review copies such as standard publishers...*

MARC: We talked about that, yeah, and it just never quite happened. What I did myself was, after the book came out, I sat down and stuffed envelopes and mailed them out to a zillion magazines.

JIM: *Any response?*

MARC: As of yet the only thing we had was a really nice article in THE WOODSTOCK TIMES *(Laughter)*, which is the perfect place to start — but that didn't come out of anything I sent out. No, I got some nice letters... very nice letters... back from **Kurt Vonnegut** and **Ray Bradbury**. I sent them copies...

JIM: *Well, that's something that should be utilized somehow.*

MARC: It finally is. You see, at first, with those guys, I sent it to them as an appreciation of their work, saying, "Here. Your work has touched me so deeply, let me show you something of mine that I think is special. Perhaps that will repay the debt somewhat." So I was really *against* using it. But, as time went by... We're sitting here pouring blood into this book and it's just, sales-wise, anyway, it's just sitting there. So we finally decided to try it. **Bradbury** has written to me every time I sent him a new issue. I can't think of any living writer I admire more than **Bradbury** — and it seems that he's just like his books... He seems to be an incredibly sweet — that seems to be the only word that applies — man. And I asked him if he would — I was really embarrassed about doing it, because, as I said, I didn't send him the book in order to squeeze a quote out of him... I asked him and he immediately wrote back saying "Of course." And gave us a very nice quote that'll be run in the ads and that we'll use — or *will* have used, by the time this is printed — on the cover of *#1*.

JIM: *What about Vonnegut?*

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"I enjoyed it thoroughly."
—Berke Breathed, **Bloom County**

"Bouncy slice-of-life stuff. (Jim Bricker's) definitely on the right track and bears watching."
—Dave Sim, **Cerebus**

"The realistic humor . . . is a welcome relief from the hordes of 'concept humor' books currently infesting the market."
—Bryan Uhlenbrock, **Capital City Distribution**

OPEN SEASON

An exercise in pacing yourself through the human race.

A three issue mini-series by Jim Bricker.
On sale in December. From Renegade Press.

"I draw like Don Martin if he was drunk."

MARC: He wrote back a nice letter saying, "You know I really appreciate MOONSHADOW, but it seems that everyday I get five letters asking me to endorse someone's masterpiece and I've done so much of that in the past that I just don't want to do it." Something like that. I was disappointed — but I clearly understood. Because, again, I admire the hell out of **Vonnegut** and I didn't send him MOONSHADOW to squeeze quotes out of him. But if he ever changes his mind. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *Well, I'm saying if twelve issues are done, repackaging it . . .*

MARC: Oh, I fantasized about that. Then you get **Kurt Vonnegut** to write the introduction and you put it right on the front — "Introduction By **Kurt Vonnegut**" — and you put it in the bookstores and people walk in and pick it up. . . You never know. That's something with the graphic novels that I think is really frustrating — because they're trying real hard to get the graphic novels in the bookstores and all that stuff — and they've got 'em into Walden Books, but when you walk into Walden Books you know where you find the graphic novels? On the comic-book rack. And the "adults" that they're trying to reach with the graphic novels are not going to sign the rack with SPIDER-MAN and all of that stuff and pick up a graphic novel. Happily, that's starting to change. But you still never know what section they'll show up in. Children's books. Humor.

JIM: *The most successful marketing that's going on is selling what they sell best to the super-hero audience . . .*

MARC: Yes.

JIM: *They do that fairly well. There really hasn't been a specific marketing plan for the non-super-hero stuff. If you do MOONSHADOW it will be lumped in MARVEL AGE with lots of articles about the latest super-hero comics.*

MIKE: Can't we get somebody more competent doing MARVEL AGE then? *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *EPIC MAGAZINE should have done more of that — if it was more successful I think — and became a magazine that people took seriously — breaking apart from the super-hero stuff. What were they doing at the end? They were, to increase sales, running John Byrne's "The Last Galactus Story."*

MARC: Right, which you can't blame them for.

JIM: *Well, I don't know. I mean, what's the point?*

MARC: You'd have to talk to Archie or Jo about that. But it does bring up the whole problem that we were talking about before. There's the element of having your cake and eating it, too. Yes, we want to do adult stuff, but no, we don't want to take the risks that are entailed. I don't even know if it's that. I don't know *what* it is. I'm totally befuddled, to tell you the truth.

JIM: *Well, I think it's almost what happened early on with Marvel. They threw out whatever came before FANTASTIC FOUR They had westerns, humor, love . . .*

MARC: Yeah.

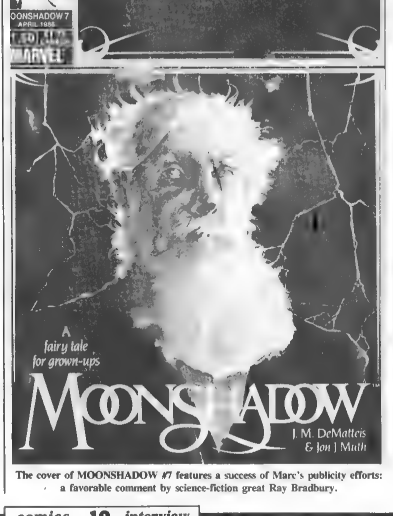
JIM: *It wasn't like some person decided, "We're only gonna do one type of thing."*

They did whatever they thought they could sell. It's unlikely they would ever have done MOONSHADOW (Laughter) *back then, so some progress has been made. What was it about the early Marvel stuff that took off? It wasn't advertising.*

MARC: Well, no, it really wasn't. It was the quality of the work. It really was.

JIM: *Was it because it wasn't, uh . . . Comic books were perceived for kids and that stuff was great for kids, although . . .*

MARC: When you went to a newsstand in those days, to the comics racks, there was a rack of DCs and a rack of all this



The cover of MOONSHADOW #7 features a success of Marc's publicity efforts: a favorable comment by science-fiction great Ray Bradbury.

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J. MARC DeMATTEIS

"Kraven plans to take Spider-Man's place."

other stuff, and the Marvels just screamed out that they were different, you know — and they really were. I guess maybe that was the case. The product made the market, you know.

JIM: *Uhuh. Well, I think that was what happened, and I don't think that could be repeated again. When Marvel launched Star Comics there seemed to be a very conscientious publicity campaign. I mean, they got on the back covers, on the backs of cereal boxes, you know — send in a coupon — subscription companies — special racks in the comic-book stores.*

MARC: That's true, but it's starting to change. I think. I *hope*.

JIM: *Why aren't there special displays for...*

MARC: Well, there should be. I think Epic Comics should be in bookstores. I think MOONSHADOW should be in bookstores — away from the other stuff. I don't know what it is. I truly don't know what it is. It's almost a drag that we have to worry about the marketing part of it, you know.

As the first part of Marc's interview was going to press, Jim Salicrup became the editor of the Spider-Man books and thus Marc became one of his writers — so interviewer Dwight Jon Zimmerman contacted Marc for some further comments and insight into and about his plans for Marvel's friendly neighborhood wall-crawler...

DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *Which Spider-Man title are you writing?*

MARC: Originally, I was supposed to do PETER PARKER, then it was WEB OF SPIDER-MAN — now it is anybody's guess.

DWIGHT: *Jim Salicrup, the interrogator who did this long interview with you, is now your editor?*

MARC: That's right, that's right. It's come full circle now. I worked for **Jim Salicrup** on CAPTAIN AMERICA many moons ago.

DWIGHT: *How about plans for Spider-Man? Anything you can elaborate on?*

MARC: I'm approaching this almost as a six-part mini-series, or a six-issue graphic novel. I'm not looking beyond those six issues. The storyline really does not enter too heavily into the continuity of the other books. In fact, I almost think you could take these issues and put them on their own as a mini-series or graphic novel.

DWIGHT: *I've seen Mike Zeck's pencils for the first issue, which features Kraven the Hunter — beautiful pencils!*

MARC: I think it's the best stuff Mike's ever done. He's really excited about the story. With THE PUNISHER and now, with this, I think he's atoning for SECRET WARS. Mike, as far as mainstream superhero artists are concerned, is as good as you can get.

DWIGHT: *I remember being in the office when you and Salicrup were discussing this first story and Jim commented that you kill and bury Spider-Man and that this*

Kraven the Hunter: the man who "kills" Spider-Man.

© 1988 by MCG

"Obviously, Spider-Man isn't dead."

Spidey gets the drop on some crooks and gives them . . .

sort of thing just happened with Batman in DARK KNIGHT.

MARC: The funny thing is, the original idea of the death goes back to an idea I had for a Wonder Man mini-series a few years ago which, happily, **Tom DeFalco** turned down. But I kept the idea and when I started doing some work for DC, a year ago, I wrote up a proposal which had the scene, revised of course, for a Batman graphic novel. The basic image of the hero being buried and then coming up out of the ground — out of the grave — was always in there. I wanted to do the story with **Mark Badger**, who went so far as to do this little painting of Batman crawling out of the grave.

So this idea's been floating around for quite some time. Then I pitched it all to **Jim Owsley** as a Spider-Man story and he went for it. The plots have been in for months now, so to pick up this issue of DARK KNIGHT and see it…the last few panels kind of pissed me off. *(Laughter.)* But in the end, well, big deal. My story is different and stands on its own.

DWIGHT: *Spider-Man lays in a casket for five more issues?*

MARC: *(Laughter.)* Well, I'm not going to give too much away here, but obviously Spider-Man isn't dead.

What the stories will explore is the theme of how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. We're playing Kraven differently. He's a man in his seventies who has kept himself young with all of his jungle potions. The sense of honor and family, and Russian spirit — which is his actual background — is strong in him. At the same time, he's come to feel that the modern world has become totally decadent. The only place where he's felt he's found any sense of honor is in the jungle. So Kraven is constantly torn between these two worlds. And the only thing that has thwarted him in his whole life has been Spider-Man.

Kraven is getting old. He knows that no potion is going to keep him alive forever. All he knows is that he has to beat Spider-Man. What he plans to do is kill Spider-Man and then take his place — prove that he can be a better Spider-Man than Spider-Man. What he becomes, of course, is not Spider-Man, but what he *perceives* Spider-Man to be.

. . .money?!?

In a sense, what Kraven becomes is something akin to **Frank Miller**'s DARK KNIGHT character.

When Spider-Man leaves the grave, he discovers that two weeks of his life have been robbed from him, because that's how long he's been in the grave. And that Kraven has stolen his costume and name and is doing all sorts of terrible things. One of the things about Peter Parker, with Spider-Man, is that he doesn't just put on a mask and become "the Spider-Man." He doesn't become transformed into this dark creature of the night. No matter what costume he has, no matter what he does, Peter Parker is always a very human, passionate, caring guy. Kraven doesn't know that. And that is the major difference here.

Where it goes…well, all I'll say here is that this definitely is the last Kraven the Hunter story. I can guarantee that much. After I'm done, there is no way anyone will be able to bring him back.

DWIGHT: *Moving to another subject, I remember hearing that you did a script for an upcoming episode of TWILIGHT ZONE?*

MARC: Right. I found writing it to be, up to a certain point, very, very refreshing and freeing, because you get to write stories about people — not about people in costumes bashing each other in the face. What I have found, unfortunately, is the old cliche about what happens to your script after you write it. I have a feeling that the show that appears will not bear much relation to what I wrote. What I've found out is that this season — unlike last, where the script was pretty much regarded as sacrosanct — the network is really interfering a lot. So I think it might be the old Hollywood story again. Regardless, I know I did a good job and it was a real satisfying experience. I want to do more work in the TV and animation end.

© 1986 by MCG

"I came home half-crocked and started throw-

BOB BURDEN

Take a formless void.

Add liberal doses of conservanism, liberalism, humanism, intelligence, ambiguity, courage, generosity, Red Blooded American good looks and joie de vivre.

Mix in equal amounts of The Beatles, Winsor McCay, Salvador Dali, Stan Lee, Will Eisner, Chester Gould, Walt Disney, Looney Tunes, Captain Kangaroo, The Marx Brothers, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, Cutty and water.

Fold in a savage wit, sprinkle with a touch of irony, and let it sit in Atlanta, Georgia, for ten years.

Add a splash of comic genius, and garnish with a pink flamingo and a Carrot.

Then pour it all in a Cuisinart and turn it on puree with the top off.

From his humble beginnings as a small child, Bob Burden, creator/author of our favorite surrealist comic, the FLAMING CARROT, has risen to the pinnacle of achievement, the highest goal a male human being can hope to attain.

Herewith, Bob Burden, the man.
(Our intrepid interviewer finally caught up with Bob in his favorite habitat — no, not a comic convention, Fuddrucker's hamburger joint in Atlanta.)

JACK MALLETTE: *How do you explain your kooky stories, quirky characters and totally unpredictable plot twists — where does this come from?*

BOB BURDEN: Well, they say you only use 10% of your brain... I'm just using the wrong ten percent. You'd think that some scientists somewhere would have discovered my book and want to study me and examine my brain. But those guys are numb. They're buried in figures and data which they collect with no discretion.

JACK: *You got something against scientists?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bob Burden
Stature: 6'2" — 185 lbs.
Born: Buffalo, NY
Residences: Lived in Pittsburg, PA, Summit, NJ; Akron, OH; Sharon, PA; Milwaukee, WI; Jacksonville, FL; now lives in Atlanta, GA
Training: Graduate of University of Georgia at Athens with a degree in broadcast journalism

Credits: Creator, writer and artist of FLAMING CARROT COMICS and "Adventures in Limbo." Actng director of the American Comotion Institute, has a photogenic memory, loves to throw champagne glasses at the fireplace after a toast but refuses to drink it from a lady's slipper
Odd Traits: Wearing more than one hat at a time

Lifelong Ambition: Rise from the grave and continue to appear through history, making life hell for people who thought they could get away with it all when I was dead
Favorite Monster: All of them
Cruelest Act: Letting my baby brother read a 3-D comic without the glasses

All art accompanying this interview is © 1986 Bob Burden unless otherwise noted.

ing the FLAMING CARROT together."

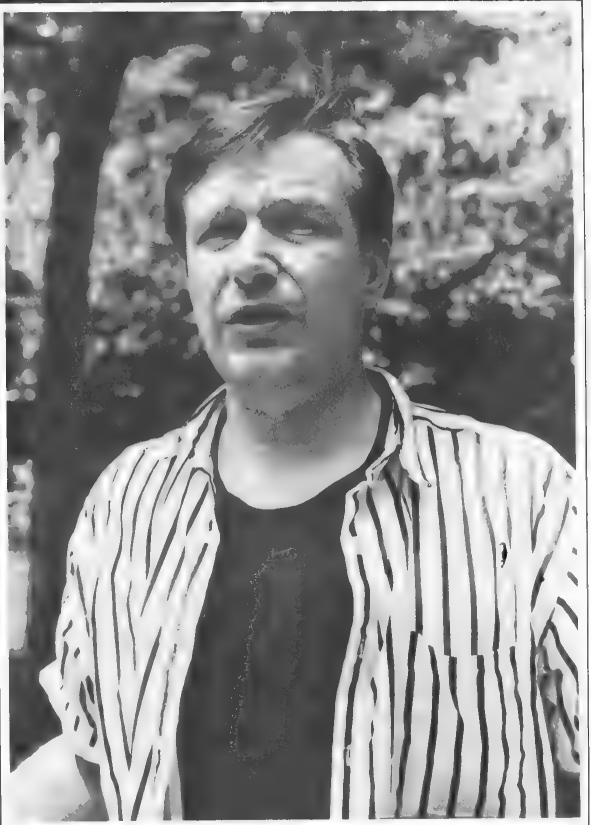

PHOTO Jack Mallette

"I'm using the wrong 10% of my brain."

BOB: They're all duds anymore. People like **Edison, Ford,** and **Ben Franklin** were thinking men first. That "one percent" of inspiration. Academics and the current school system has ruined the modern man. Where it was once 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration, now science is about 35% to 65% perspiration and 0% inspiration. Scientists and researchers, are men of knowledge. Inventors and thinkers are men of wisdom. Ideally, men of vision should rule the sciences. After all, chemists and doctors are no different from shipping clerks or parts managers. Yet they get rich, while the few thinkers out there — whom the doctors should bow before and lick the boots of — are jeered at and live a threadbare existence.

JACK: *Uh — so why THE FLAMING CARROT?*

BOB: It started in 1979, the first printed appearance of the Carrot was in VISIONS #1.

JACK: *And VISIONS was –?*

BOB: Ahh, a sort of early direct-market comic that **Lamar Waldron** was putting together, and he had some stories in there by him and **Rod Whigham**, who is now drawing G.I. JOE. There was also an interview with **Jim Sternko**, a very in-depth interview, a **Neal Adams** front cover and a **Rudy Nebres** back cover. It was magazine-size on really high-quality paper.

JACK: *Wasn't this the Atlanta Fantasy Fair program?*

BOB: Well, it was incorporated into that with issue #3. Lamar was also running the Atlanta Fantasy Fair at that time. VISIONS #2 had the Artless Dodger story in it. What happened was, Lamar called me up and said, "Hey, are you going to put a story in the next issue of VISIONS?" I said, "Yeah, what's the deadline?" and he said, "Two days." So I put the whole thing together — I wrote, drew, and inked a whole eight-page story — in two days.

JACK: *Amazing!*

BOB: Now to me, that ridiculous, crude thing had a certain energy and insanity that was neat...the Artless Dodger's secret hideout is in the Flaming Carrot's spare bathroom. Totally ridiculous! Somebody — I forget who — told me that they felt it was the best comic story in 15 years.

JACK: *Did those two days totally wipe you out?*

BOB: No, it was kind of fun. I just got up in the morning and worked all day and did it. Just being able to do whatever you want is a lot of fun! I didn't know writing and drawing was hard, so it was easy. See, I live a different lifestyle than a lot of other people insofar as they have a regular job built on schedules, and I'm like the little kid that grew up and never went to work. Not a silly child, I mean, more like a cowboy. I drifted. I was a wanderer. A Viking. An Outrider. I'm still a little kid! I get to do what I want to do, you know? I've always been that way, always been able to survive.

JACK: *I hear that copies of VISIONS #*'s 1-3 are selling very briskly at conventions because they are the first appearances of the Flaming Carrot. Weren't there two #3s or something like that?

BOB: There're two FLAMING CARROT #1s, not two #3 VISIONS. There were full eight-page stories in each issue of VISIONS. Number three had one or

"I quit when SPIDER-MAN lost Ditko."

two funny spots in it, but it wasn't like #2. Number one was just plain crude — it's an example in print of me going in there, not knowing anything about drawing comics, or using pens, or anything, just a total amateur going in there and drawing a comic *carte-blanche*. I'm a living experiment! I'm an individual who never went to art school, who never knew anything about art, who just doodled, starting up a comic career out of nowhere — out of thin air.

JACK: *Not so much out of thin air. I consider your art very DaDa-esque, and I can see some Winsor McCay in there. Who do you consider your influences?*

BOB: One thing that affected me was seeing **Kurosawa's** SEVEN SAMURAI. That made me aware that there was another language — that there was this language of beauty and art. Seeing that film — up until then I'd seen movies, but it was always these cowboy movies, or army movies, or things like that. All of a sudden I saw this **Kurosawa** film around 1963 or '64, somewhere in there, and it was like my world changed. My perspective changed. I saw that you could go out there and create something that was fascinating, and beautiful, and intriguing And this became sort of like my imperative, my direction.

It was also around this time, 1966 or so, that I quit buying comics. **HERBIE** went under and SPIDER-MAN lost **Ditko**, and I quit buying comics altogether for a while. But around that time period I picked up Harvey's reprints of the SPIRIT and the FIGHTING AMERICAN. Those two books were extremely powerful in showing that there was a whole other world of stuff, archaic comics that nobody knew anything about. They're out there, and they were fascinating and good quality See, a lot of the stuff I'd seen before that was golden age was just real junk, and it was really annoying. And I was taking stuff like the old **Bill Finger** BATMANs seriously! And the perspective was all I could complain about when I was a little kid of eight or ten years old. I thought it was great when **Infantino** came along, but I guess I'd still rather have the old **Bill Finger** ones, because now they're so intriguing and they're kind of like **Charles Burns'** work. Have you seen any of that?

JACK: *No. I haven't.*

BOB: He did a thing called BIG BABY and the CURSE OF THE MOLE MEN and some stuff in RAW that is just beautiful. I think that one of the great tragedies of the publishing history of the early comics is that the SPIRIT has to be reprinted again and again and again, every three to five years. And it keeps trying to get off the ground, but it never goes. It gets splattered all over the place. They should have held back until the right moment, when they had national distribution, and really pushed it.

I had an idea for a comic maybe ten years ago that was going to be a newsstand comic, and it would have a complete SPIRIT story in it, done perfectly and with good color separations. I would also have an episode of POPEYE in it — those are classics.

JACK: *Segar POPEYE?*

BOB: Yeah. I'd have some **Winsor**

The Artless Dodger.

RED HUMBUG'S COMIC FANS

WE'RE HERE TO INTERVIEW RENEGADE PRESS PUBLISHER DENI LOUBERT ABOUT HER NEW TITLE, HOLIDAY OUT!
WELL, RED, WE'RE EXCITED ABOUT OUR NEW BOOK OF COMIC STRIPS--
STRIPS?!! COMIC STRIPS? ER... I DON'T DO COMIC STR-
I'M SURPRISED AT YOUR PREJUDICE AGAINST COMIC STRIPS, RED!
I'M MORE INTO COMIC BOOKS AND STUFF!
A LOT OF TALENT HAS STRIPPED, RED!
YEAH, WELL, IT'S NOT MY THING, DENI.
AND HOLIDAY OUT'S CHOCK FULL OF RAW TALENT LIKE--
PLEASE. STOP.
GRASS GREEN, WHO HAS WORKED FOR MANY MAJOR COMICS PUBLISHERS AND HELPED FOUND FANDOM!
BOY, IT'S DARK! WHAT'S TH' TIME?
11 A.M. P.M.
WHICH IS IT? A.M. OR P.M.?
A.M. P.M.
WAYNE TRUMAN, WHO INKS EXTENSIVELY FOR ECLIPSE COMICS.
BABES LOOKIN' AT YOU!
AND CHARLES T. SMITH, WHOSE WORK HAS APPEARED IN CHARLTON COMICS.
Art: Duane Hanson
Copy: Michael Vance
NOW SURELY YOU'RE INTRIGUED ENOUGH TO TRY OUR NEW BOOK OF STRIPS!
OH! COMIC STRIPS! FOR A MINUTE I THOUGHT YOU WERE SELLING A BOOK WHERE--
COMICS STRIP! CAN YOU IMAGINE ROBIN WILLIAMS NUDE?! YUCK! PTOU! BARF!
SAY! THIS IS GOOD! REAL NAKED ENERGY! I REALLY LIKE THIS WAY THIS WOMAN PUTS HERSELF AT RISK!
SERIOUSLY, FOLKS, HOLIDAY OUT IS GREAT! TRY IT!
HOLIDAY OUT
AVAILABLE FROM
Renegade Press

"Gary Groth's like CITIZEN KANE."

McCay reprints in it, like three pages of DREAMS OF THE RAREBIT FIEND and three pages of LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND, plus some new stuff. They made a big mistake trying to get the general public with the METAL HURLANT magazine, what is that...?

JACK: *HEAVY METAL.*

BOB: Right. Because HEAVY METAL had these damned continued stories that you can't follow. You don't know what the hell is going on. You'd be better off putting all the stories in one issue rather than having five or ten stories continued issue-to-issue. To have a book come out periodically that is just good, clean, pure, complete entertainment. You know, POPEYE, **Winsor McCay**...introduce the American public to the fact that there are people in the comic-book industry like **Eisner** and **Barks**...people as important in the history of art as **Stephen King** is in horror books, or **Orson Welles** is in the movie business, but they're just not household words. You see what I'm saying? You know, there are **Marlon Brandos** out there in the comic-book business that are completely unknown, they're as unknown as **Elijah Cook**. You remember, he was that movie actor that was in all those PERRY MASON episodes?

JACK: *I remember.*

BOB: Anyways, the point is that they need some massive *move*, some big hustle to get it over the top, and it's a funny thing how that happens. With James Bond, one day **JFK** listed his ten favorite books, and number seven on the list was CASINO ROYALE. All of a sudden, since he had the spotlight and everything, James Bond just took off like a skyrocket.

JACK: *In a book like you're talking about, would you put in the Carrot, or would you put in one of your vignette stories, or would you put in a single shot of one of your other characters, like the Red Donut?*

BOB: You got me! I don't know what I'd put in there *(Laughter.)*

INTERCOM: Judy...Judy, your burger's ready.

BOB: Put that in there! *(Laughter.)*

JACK: *Judy, get your #%&* burger!*

BOB: I've really made a mess of mine..

JACK: *Beans, anyone?*

BOB: No!

(General Laughter.)

JACK: *What do you think about the current mini-series avalanche? Everybody and his brother is putting out a one-issue micro-series, a four-issue mini-series, or a twelve-issue maxi-series. What about the DARK KNIGHT, for instance?*

BOB: There're two facts about the mini-

Frank Miller tackled DARK KNIGHT. John Byrne grappled with SUPERMAN. Now, Bob Burden and Arthur Adams grab the artistic reins of — Gumby! 40 four-color pages from Comico this summer. THE GUMBY SPECIAL.

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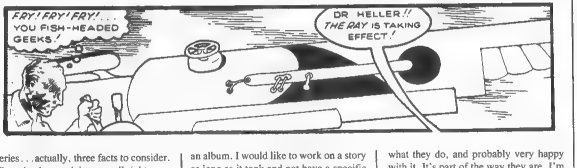
"Gangster films were just gangster



series... actually, three facts to consider. First, they're not doing so well right now. Most mini-series have not done well as far as sales; most sales have been abysmal.

Okay, the second thing is that, from a production standpoint, being on a book with an unlimited number of issues is like standing on the ramparts of a Moorish castle as Christian soldiers are coming over the top, and you're trying to chop their heads off. And it's like, every time you turn around, there's this legion there, like armies rising from the dead; you know, skeletons coming out of the ground chasing after you, and you chop one's head off, and another one pops up from somewhere else. That's the terror you live under on a monthly book — like people living in the American embassy in the mideast are living in terror all the time, so are comic artists who have a particular series.

JACK: *So that's why people like John Byrne want to take a break from doing the X-MEN, or the FANTASTIC FOUR and get into something else?*

BOB: Right. I would like to put out a comic story the way a musical band puts out an album. I would like to work on a story as long as it took and not have a specific deadline or page count to conform to. If a story is 30 pages or 50 or 80 — then that's how long the book is. The DARK KNIGHT was the first successful example of that and people don't know it yet. I would be very attracted to that format. If DC had made the mistake of promoting DARK KNIGHT as some new format or had called it The Graphic Novel of the Year or The Mini-Series of the Century it would have hurt. They promoted it as THE DARK KNIGHT and people bought it.

I'm not saying that all comics should be done like this, but it should be an opportunity when needed. Now, the third fact about the mini-series is that you also have the chance to do another issue number one!

JACK: *Speaking of number ones, what do you think of Frank Miller's DARK KNIGHT and John Byrne's new SUPERMAN?*

BOB: Miller's an artist and **John Byrne**'s an illustrator. They're both very good at what they do, and probably very happy with it. It's part of the way they are. I'm a writer, okay? The fact that I draw art is purely coincidental to that, but I'm not really what you'd call a competent illustrator. **Kurt Schaffenberger** is magnificent. There's just something beautiful about the stuff he does.

JACK: *Underrated, too.*

BOB: Totally underrated. One individual that is very underrated, and I would hire him in a minute if I had a chance, is **Joe Kubert**. That guy can knock stuff out so fast, and his stuff is so beautiful, his understanding of anatomy is just totally magnificent. He's as close to an individual school of art as **Jack Kirby**...very close to it, at least.

Because of what I'm doing now with the bizarre superhero, the ridiculous superhero, I see two directions that my stuff could take. First, I would develop serious characters; then I would also develop the ludicrous, funny ones, too.

You've got people out there that are doing real good stuff. You know, the **Hernandez** brothers — one of them's doing a cartoony type thing, and the other one's doing something that's very serious. It's humorous, and everything like that, but it's also an extremely moving piece of literature.

JACK: *You're talking about LOVE & ROCKETS?*

BOB: Yeah, those guys I would hire in a minute. If I had a million dollars, I would hire both of them. I would hire **Joe Kubert**, and those fellows doing the heartbreak comics. I'd do what **Gary Groth**'s doing, grabbing up all these artists, kind of like CITIZEN KANE. See what I'm saying? He's like Citizen Kane, who had all these statues in his basement. **Gary Groth** is grabbing up people like **Rick Geary, Crumb,** the **Friedman's,** and the **Hernandez** brothers, and other new talent and he's putting them under his flag, under his stamp. But he's not really exploiting them like he should. For their own benefits, I mean.

JACK: *What do you think of Bill Sienkewicz's ELEKTRA. ASSASSIN?*

films until BONNIE AND CLYDE."

BOB: I haven't read it yet. You see, basically I read very little. For two reasons: number one, time; number two, to avoid being derivative. Now I violated that rule with the **Hernandez** brothers' book, **Robert Crumb** books, and with **Harvey Pekar**, because that stuff's so interesting to me that I really can't resist — I *have* to pick it up! I can't resist the temptation to read it. WEIRDO, RAW

Charles Burns is another guy that I'd hire in a minute. He's an incredible draftsman, and he may be one of these guys whose day is yet to come.

JACK: *You're talking about a lot of writers and artists who are on the "cutting edge" of a whole different school of comics.*

BOB: Right, and comics are changing. What if the movie industry had come along, and, instead of developing melodramas, gangster movies, westerns, love stories, adventure stories, art films, science fiction films, all these different genres that exist in the motion picture industry, what if 90% of what Hollywood turned out was westerns? That's what happened with comics. They found the market, they've *niched* into it. When you talk about Marvel and DC comics, you're not talking about "comic books," you're talking about a *genre* of comic books which has its *niche*, which is extremely limited.

For the American comic book to be as successful as comics are in Europe, and Japan and places like that, they need to get out of the one particular genre. There is room for good stuff, you know.

DARK KNIGHT is a very successful thing in that it's good, within that particular genre. Gangster films were just gangster films until BONNIE & CLYDE came along, which was a gangster film, but it was different from all the other gangster films...

JACK: *A "slice of life" gangster film?*

BOB: No, an "Art House" gangster film, they had a lot of French photographers in

Is the Flaming Carrot really Michael Jackson?

"Amazing Baby — He would pee on you!"

on that, and the thing was well-filmed, it was well-scripted, it was well-acted, it was facetiously loose with the historical facts, but still it was a beautiful film. BONNIE AND CLYDE was a film of historical significance, in that it was the first "Art House Film" that received a mass market success. It set a marketing trend for things like MIDNIGHT COWBOY and EASY RIDER and the public just stopped going to see the **Doris Day/Rock Hudson** romantic comedies. When BONNIE AND CLYDE came out, it was a total flop. It was re-released after it won all the Academy Awards and was a big money maker. If you lead the public to water it will probably drink it, but sometimes you have to lead them by the nose. TREASURE OF SIERRA MADRE is the best film **Bogart** was ever in, but people don't know it, they think it's CASABLANCA. Voyeurism is the big appeal to CASABLANCA and MALTESE FALCON. Wearing a trench coat, snap brimmed hat and carrying a .45 in a shoulder holster was cool when I was 8 or 12 years old, but it's not high art, just camp like Indiana Jones. Most people don't know that **Cagney** was a better actor than **Bogart. Cagney** was a "great" actor, **Bogart** was a "good" actor with a really fine visual appeal **Cagney** had visual appeal, more than **Bogart**, but he was a real actor like **Burgess Meredith** or **Ruth Gordon** or **Paul Muni** or **Robert DeNiro** or **Dustin Hoffman**.

JACK: *This is strange, but you're the fourth or fifth person in the last couple of months who, for some reason or another, has told me that they like the AFRICAN QUEEN or TREASURE OF THE SIERRA MADRE better than CASABLANCA or THE MALTESE FALCON.*

BOB: You know, that's where my heart is, really, the motion picture industry. I've got a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Georgia.

JACK: *So, instead you locked yourself in your room and started drawing THE FLAMING CARROT.*

BOB: I never locked myself in my room! I came home one night when I was half crocked from Happy Hour, and started throwing the thing together *(laughter)* , and the door was open, the windows were open. .

JACK: *My first impressions of you were about seven or eight years ago at the Atlanta Fantasy Fair. There you were, sitting in your little corner, and every now and then somebody would wander up and talk to you. And you had all this fascinating material on your table! Everything from paperbacks to. . .*

BOB: Pulps.

JACK: *. . .to pulps, to. . .*

BOB: . . .Amusing Baby. I had those plastic babies, you know, that would sit on the toilet. You put water in the toilet bowl, and you had a little bulb like a squirt flower on the back of the toilet, and he would pee on you! *(Laughter.)* And on the box it had a picture of two kids going pee, pee — you know, spraying each other — and it was really neat because it had like moveable arms and legs, and his eyes would roll in his head. It was a classic artifact. I've still got a few of those things around. I sold them for $3 each in the box.

JACK: *It wasn't until a few years later that I finally connected you with THE FLAMING CARROT. I'd been reading the Carrot in Visions, and then I got to talking with Harley Anton one day, and he said, yeah, that guy over in the corner does THE FLAMING CARROT, and I said, "You're joking!" He said no, and the next thing I know, there's this Flaming Carrot walking around the Atlanta Fantasy Fair.*

BOB: Oh, yeah, I remember that!

JACK: *Do you still have the costume?*

BOB: Yeah. Well, I didn't get in the costume. I've never gotten in it, because it would be sort of like "not fair" for me to do that in some strange way. *(Leaving Fuddrucker's hamburger joint. Getting into the car and driving home.)*

BOB: . . .''playing fast and loose with reality.'' I don't know the question to that. That's the answer.

JACK: *That's the answer to "why THE FLAMING CARROT?''*

BOB: Yeah, I guess.

JACK: *Okay, let's play fast and loose with reality. let's push that a step further, and. . .why play fast and loose with reality? Is this just the kind of person you are, is this an extension of your personalty? Or, is this a social commentary of some kind, or what?*

BOB: Playing fast and loose with reality is a concept that I invented that basically entails not becoming possessed with trying to make your story just like everything you've read before.

A lot of people read comics when they were kids, and you could tell what kind of comics they read by what they'd end up doing. And with my book, in order to survive, in order to cover up the fact that I'm maybe not the best illustrator going, or whatever, it doesn't really *look* like a comic book. Put it on pause for a second. .

(Major intersection.)

Okay. The story-making process is a very complex thing. On the one hand, you've got total liberty to do whatever you want. On the other hand, you're limited by the fact that it has to be understandable, and it has to be within the realm of your imagination. And I've just trained myself to have a very loose, very open imagination.

JACK: *Disbelief gets a workout when a person reads your comics.*

BOB: Right, but see, it's also what you come up with. Comics in the creative field is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you can suspend reality only so far. When you suspend reality, you have to come up

"I hated the JETSONS. . .crummy."

with a new reality. In other words, with Superman, they had to invent kryptonite, because prior to that, he was all powerful, and it kind of threw the whole thing off just by the fact that Superman could've ended World War II in about eight or nine hours, just an average working day! *(Laughter.)* And it's a non-realistic thing.

Then you have to look at it in order to really understand it. You can go beyond that and look at it as kind of an allegorical thing. And the thing that makes that interesting is that there are certain realisms that are suspended, and they are at the same time counter-acted by certain rules and deficiencies that are inherent in this whole set-up. In other words, Spider-Man has things that throw him off, that defeat him, that slow him down for awhile.

Now, with the Carrot, the first three, four or five stories he did not capture a single villain. He foiled them, but he didn't capture them.

One thing that I've always been fascinated with, one of my early projects was a thing called ALL-VILLAIN COMICS. Instead of dwelling with the standard format of good *versus* evil, the major protagonists would be villains. Take the Marvel Universe, and what if Doctor Doom had been the good guy, and the Fantastic Four had been the bad guys, constantly trying to put something over.

JACK: *Filling the villains' shoes, in other words.*

BOB: Except they were ruling, they were successful, and Doctor Doom was hunted and chased after. Where I came up with that was, one time I bought a stack of DICK TRACY comics about a foot-and-a-half tall, and he had such great villains The villains were really the stars of the strip. I started looking into them more and more, and pretty much realized that the villains were more interesting characters than a lot of the heroes they were coming up with.

JACK: *Did ALL-VILLAIN COMICS see publication?*

BOB: No. Just another dream from the early '70s.

JACK: *Well, maybe we'll see a one-shot one day.*

BOB: Well, see, I've been thinking about direct-market comics since about 1970. I have covers I did for, like, DEAD-END STORIES, and I had a science-fiction thing I always wanted to do called FANTASY FANTASTIC.

JACK: *The Carrot made an appearance in ANYTHING GOES #1. What did you think of that book?*

BOB: The whole thing was an interesting concept, and...let's stop here.

ALL-VILLAIN COMICS — "Just another dream from the '70s."

(After a brief stop at Winn-Dixie for eggs, bread and blank tape, the interview continues.)

JACK: *I'm holding onto the eggs...now, what about ANYTHING GOES?*

BOB: What did I think of that? I think that the fellow that did the color separations on my piece did a tremendous job that was a work of art unto itself.

JACK: *Who was that?*

BOB: Gary Freeman. I had the best color in the book.

JACK: *I agree.*

BOB: I think overall the book was separated with some kind of laser scanner, apparently some *el cheapo* model, because they made all the reds turn to brown. And even if you look at the yellow real close — and there wasn't much yellow in there — it's got little red dots on it, so it's kind of browned-out, too. It kind of has a look like too much makeup, or something like that. But I'd like to see it done again with **Gary Freeman's** color separations — you know, done on a proper scanner where the thing could be done just perfectly.

Arriving at Bob's house, where, naturally, the TV has been on all day.)

JACK: *The JETSONS!*

BOB: Yeah. I hate them.

JACK: *You're kidding! Why?*

BOB: I've got this atttiude that's similar to **Robert Crumb's**. There're certain things that become popular, become cultural phenomena, and I can remember hating them. I hated the JETSONS and all those crummy cartoons. I like the 1930s cartoons, and FANTASIA, and things like that, back when there was real quality.

JACK: *You mean like Disney, and the Fleischer SUPERMANs, and things like that?*

BOB: Yeah! And, to me, the JETSONS, and the FLINTSTONES and stuff like that

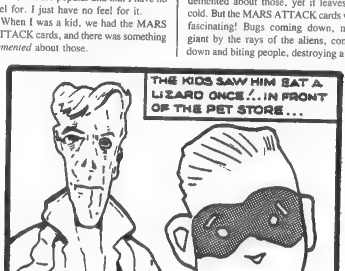
"He's totally unconscious of the fact that

is basically rude stuff. It's junk, it's K-MART quality stuff. It's not classy at all. There're a lot of things like that, like music, that are popular and that I have no feel for. I just have no feel for it.

When I was a kid, we had the MARS ATTACK cards, and there was something *demented* about those.

JACK: *Very demented!*

BOB: Now they have the GARBAGE PAIL KIDS, and there's something demented about those, yet it leaves me cold. But the MARS ATTACK cards were fascinating! Bugs coming down, made giant by the rays of the aliens, coming down and biting people, destroying a dog and all that — there was just something charismatic about that.



Other things, too. Once upon a time I liked and read the old **Stan Lee/Jack Kirby/Steve Ditko** Marvel superhero stuff, and that was real fascinating. It was a whole other world. But a lot of the stuff coming out today I just haven't had the desire to get into. There isn't anything charismatic about it, or shocking, or powerful, it's just a generic, watered-down, very commercial version of what was once Marvel.

JACK: *Just being outrageous for the sake of being outrageous.*

BOB: Why, is the stuff pretty outrageous these days?

JACK: *Well, for instance, the GARBAGE PAIL KIDS. That's pretty outrageous, but it's gross-out for gross-out's sake. What's the point?*

BOB: Yeah, but we had stuff like the GARBAGE PAIL KIDS back then

JACK: *Sure, the Basil Wolverton cards and things like that. Remember those? Those were delightfully perverse.*

BOB: Yeah, the Big Daddy stuff has come full circle, and it's nostalgia, and now it's neat, and it's some type of cryptic old thing. I couldn't stand those things, those models the kids had...

he's in a carrot mask and flippers."

JACK: *The Ratfinks?*

BOB: Yeah! They were just so-o-o awful to me, and now it's come full circle, and it's good again. People like it. Now, I must admit that there are some of those things that I look at in a different perspective now, myself. I suppose I'm a little bit less of a cranky old man than **R. Crumb.**

JACK: *So, how does this relate to the FLAMING CARROT?*

BOB: The FLAMING CARROT is an offshoot of the superhero concept, being a thing that began with Superman in 1938, and it derived its lineage from The Shadow, all the way back to the Greek heroes. The only difference was, when Superman came along, science fiction, other planets, things like that were thrown in as a concept, and it made a very good, successful mix. It also took the hero and spun him off from the realistic, hardboiled detective hero that was popular at that time into a realm where there was a much greater suspended reality, and it was just kind of part and parcel to the whole medium.

Now the Carrot comes along a little further downr the road, and the Carrot, as far as literature goes, is kind of an anti-anti-hero. In other words, you had the heroes, then you had the anti-heroes in the Sixties, and now he's like anti- the anti-heroes from the Sixties. He's not an individual that is brooding and sad all the time, and introspective, and going through all the psychological problems; he's basically a child-like simpleton that really enjoys life, he enjoys what he's doing, and is totally unconscious of the fact that he's walking around in a carrot mask with flippers on.

JACK: *Sort of like ROOTS: THE NEXT GENERATION — only on a different planet.*

BOB: Like, the whole concept of satirizing and spoofing something can be really tiresome, and it's just a logical progression of stuff. But with the Carrot — he's kind of stepped off the checkerboard, gone off the screen into a world of surrealism. He's a surrealistic superhero. And it's within that framework that I'm able to tell an interesting, entertaining story.

Actually, the whole point of it was to come up with something that was — the right chords fitting together. Like, if I took over a TV network, and I said, "Hey, why don't we film a crossover episode of HILL STREET BLUES and THE A-TEAM?" Now, there's something magic and good about that that would work. It would be kind of a surrealistic, bizarre thing where just the whole concept would predicate a really interesting story. But, if you had THREE'S COMPANY cross over with THE DANNY THOMAS SHOW, that wouldn't be anything particularly interesting or exciting.

JACK: *Just an odd juxtaposition, and seeing how they play off each other?*

BOB: Right. **Drew Freedman** is a master of doing some of the most outlandish, off-the-wall, insane extrapolations.

JACK: *Drew Freedman being known for...*

BOB: SIMILARITIES TO ALL PERSONS ARE PURELY COINCIDENTAL. That thing. Now, the Carrot, as a character, is kind of like Popeye, insofar as the character can go to the moon, or the moon's made of green cheese, or something like that. And at the same time, it's kind of like **Monty Python**, in that

#17

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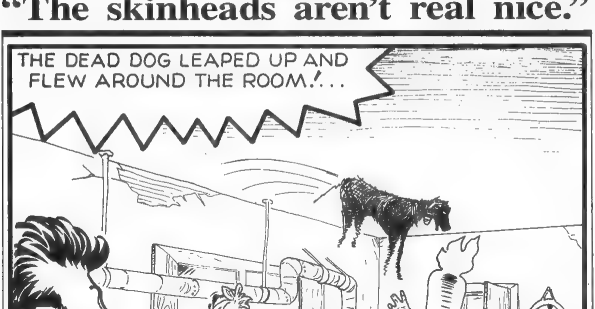
"The skinheads aren't real nice."



The dead dog leaped up and flew around the room.

ridiculous things will be able to crop up.

JACK: *Absurd comedy.*

BOB: Yeah.

JACK: *C.C. Beck is almost bitter about the work being done in comics nowadays, because he says it's too serious, it's too severe. Artists and writers have lost sight of the fact, in his mind, that comics are meant to entertain people.*

BOB: Well, he had some great characters that nobody really knows about, like Mr. Tawny, and the worm that took over the world, Mr. Mind or whatever his name was. Yeah, **C.C. Beck's** perspective had that child-like sense of wonder, and the comics coming out nowadays from Marvel and DC are incestuously adolescent. They're locked into that market.

That's not saying that those people cannot do good stuff — it's just that they can't deviate too much, or they're going to lose their market, their base.

At the same time, they have to deal with deadlines, and whole creative ideas are thrown out the window. The comic-book companies should get their heads together and hit the mass market, and segments of it, as best they can. For instance, studio wrestling is very big now all of a sudden. I'd love to work on a comic about that for one of the big companies. One of the first stories I ever wrote, back when I was fifteen, was about two studio wrestlers in western Pennsylvania who turned to crime. It was a very depressing story and took place in the winter, snow...in the milltowns. It's kind of all spoiled now that it's gone pop. I mean, wrestling is no longer depressing.

Hippies are coming back, too.

JACK: *What?*

BOB: Hippies are in now, like the studio wrestling thing. You could do a hippie comic and it would sell. I had a great idea for a story about five years ago. Flaming Carrot and Radzak Zokey go to Dahlonega, Georgia, and pan for gold and they fight off renegade hippies up in the hills who have become barkbits. Everyone wonders what happened to all the hippies. Suddenly, they're gone. Now I can't use it. It would be trite now, but five years ago, it would have been cool. Some day, the Punks will be gone. They're a lot like the hippies. I see the same self-consciousness, iconoclasm, loneliness, wanting to be different. They dress mean but mostly they're real nice people. Most any movement is just a fashion show at heart. "Oh, I want to make a statement with the way I look." The skinheads aren't real nice. At least, not here in Atlanta. They leave me alone but they're pretty mean. I think something happens to you when you cut all your hair off. It's no longer a fashion statement but a fascist statement. They become like Klingons. If there was a war going on they could be heroes.

They'd all get killed and we'd build statues to them. It's in the genes. Part of nature and the balance of things.

And I agree with **C.C. Beck** about things being too serious. It's a disappointment to someone like me and him as readers, and to other people out there like us.

JACK: *Every time I can grab the ear of someone at Marvel or DC at a convention, I ask them to, please, not give us any more of what I call the Three D's: Demons, Death and Destruction. I'm sick of it. We've had enough mutants! Give us something else for awhile. Whenever the*

"Basically, I do not touch on sex

new comics would come into my store, I'd always pick up 'MAZING MAN or ANGEL LOVE first. I haven't read an X-MEN in months.

BOB: That's the thing. There's a turnover in that kind of stuff. NATIONAL LAMPOON did a thing on MAD magazine one time, a satire issue where they had a thing called, "You Know You're Too Old For MAD When:" There's a constantly revolving audience that grows into it and out of it.

It's like being in the children's shoe industry. There's a constant large turnover, and it depends upon things like that. But they're able to cater to such a large quantity with such a narrow market.

In the comic-book business, they've only exploited a very small fragment of the adolescent market with the superhero business. There's still a lot of potential for a lot of other books that would garner the interests of other groups.

Also, one of the things about comics is that the people who are doing them take themselves so-oo seriously, and it's apparent in the product. That's all well and good, but there's a whole other world beyond that, the world of entertaining stories. **Carl Barks** is a classic example of someone who not only entertained the little kids, but adults who are exposed to the reprints are suddenly won over by the charm and wit in the stories.

Now, the SILVER SURFER was good, those first eight books, but I can't really remember any of the stories. I can remember the plots of twenty-five or thirty SPIRIT stories right off the top of my head. The one where time stops just as the guy shoots the bullet at the guy's back, and he runs around and steals the money

JACK: *Or the one where the little guy's flying.*

BOB: Yeah, Gerhard Schnobble. You can remember those things. You can remember **Barks'** stories, the square eggs story, and things like that. And the ability to remember it is of key importance.

Now, with the Carrot, I remembered this obscure Golden Age character called The Fin, or something like that. He had this three-foot-tall fin on top of his head, which was kind of ridiculous, 'cause he'd have to bend over to walk through a doorway. That was completely suspended from reality. If he had to enter a room, they'd just show him walking up to the room in one panel, and in the next panel he'd be in the room.

JACK: *A little difficult to translate into television.*

BOB: Right, exactly. It was a preposterous thing! And they were doing so many of them.

JACK: *Where did The Fin appear?* **I don't know. MARVEL MYSTERY, or USA COMICS, or something like that. I was kind of fascinated with that concept, and I came up with the Carrot. The Carrot is kind of a Salvador Dali** version of the superhero. There are elements in it that are moved around in strange, bizarre ways, and it causes a quirky feeling when you look at it.

I took this particular idea and scratched it down one night when I came home about three o'clock in the morning. I'd been out on the town all night, and it was one of those nights when I came home tired, and fell asleep with my clothes on. I turned the light back on and said, "Flaming Carrot — that would be a good idea for a character, and . . ."

JACK: *So you ran down the street, and you told Joe Schuster, who drew it down, and the rest is history!*

or racism or politics or religion."

BOB: *(Laughter.)* Yeah, right! Basically, the Carrot is different from all the other satires of superheroes because they were kind of. . .Supersnipe would have a towel around his neck and longjohns on, and Herbie Popnecker would have a plunger on his head, and all this other makeshift stuff. The idea of having flippers and a giant carrot that burned is so far removed from this kind of satire that it's actually surrealistic. Grotesque. Bizarre.

There's something aesthetically pleasing about, say, Mickey Mouse that the imitations just didn't have. Mickey Mouse was magic. The four **Beatles** were magic; the way they dressed, the way they looked, that was "It." People identified the whole scene with that particular thing.

JACK: *A person's initial reaction to anything counts for a lot. Obviously, their initial reaction to something like the FLAMING CARROT is not going to be, "Hey, this is a rip-off of. . ."*

BOB: Exactly!

JACK: *It can't be!*

BOB: It's going to be an odd thing, a strange, mysterious thing.

JACK: *And it immediately puts them in a strange position when they read your book. They don't know what to expect at all.*

BOB: It removes the normal predications that you're going to have with a lot of other stuff. When I first started reading the DARK KNIGHT and THE WATCHMEN, they both kind of exploded at the same time, and they're kind of similar. I could really identify with the creators of those, because they're thinkng along lines that are really very interesting, and a good direction for comics. They were coming up with some very interesting characters and concepts. Batman has always been a very interesting character; he's always fascinated a lot of people.

JACK: *And in the early Golden Age books, he was a true vigilante. If he didn't like a criminal, or he thought he should be eliminated, he eliminated him! He'd shoot him, or throw him off a rooftop. He carried a gun: most people are not aware of that. It was only later on that they sanitized him and made him more acceptable to the parents.*

BOB: The kids could accept that. Kids can get off on that stuff. It's just the mothers who hold the power over the children. And now you're getting into a moral question: are there certain things that people shouldn't be exposed to? Movies and the comics have always given a false sense of the way things really are.

When a person picks a gun up in his hands for the first time, his first comment is usually, "It's so *heavy*!" And they're surprised by this. The whole concept of violence they know nothing about, whereas, in 1959, a 35-year-old Russian would know what a gun felt like, and he'd know what a bullet wound looked like.

Peckinpah knows nothing about the concept of violence and how to portray it on the screen. He does a really crummy job of it. But because it's so arty and crafty, the public thinks he's the violence expert, and they're totally and completely wrong!

I can't think of someone off the top of my head who's good at violence. It's eerie to see realistically-portrayed screen violence, anyway.

JACK: *Did you see PAPILLON?*

BOB: Yeah. . .*yeah!*

JACK: *The realism of that movie really struck me. He reaches up and pulls out a tooth. He eats a cockroach. These are things that. . .*

BOB: That's a *great* example, Jack, of a movie that really hit the spot as far as giving you a realistic feeling of things like that. When you see the A-TEAM, they shoot machine-gun bullets at people's feet, and no one ever gets killed and that's not real. BONNIE & CLYDE was a movie that gave you that feeling of realism. Like that scene where **Gene Hackman's** shot, they went real authentic on that particular scene, with the old sleeveless T-shirt, and the sunglasses, and the scene in the park.

JACK: *I heard they took the car that Bonnie and Clyde were killed in on tour of the county fairs for years.*

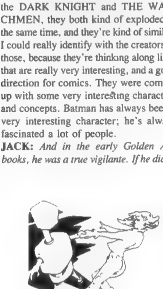
BOB: Yeah, I know the guy who did it.

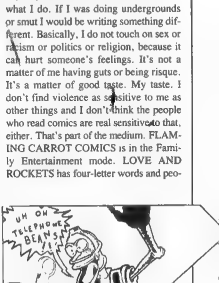
JACK: *Really?*

BOB: Yeah. I used to work for him. He was a movie producer. He was the advance man for IT HAPPENED ONE NIGHT down in New Orleans.

JACK: *Neat. Now since you brought up the question of whether there are certain things people shouldn't be exposed to — what about censorship?*

BOB: The medium I work in determines what I do. If I was doing undergrounds or smut I would be writing something different. Basically, I do not touch on sex or racism or politics or religion, because it can hurt someone's feelings. It's not a matter of me having guts or being risque. It's a matter of good taste. My taste. I don't find violence as sensitive to me as other things and I don't think the people who read comics are real sensitive to that, either. That's part of the medium. FLAMING CARROT COMICS is in the Family Entertainment mode. LOVE AND ROCKETS has four-letter words and peo-





"Checks are so dainty and feminine.

ple walking around with their hooters hanging out, but that's for mature audiences. It is presented in such a way that it is not vulgar, just part of the story. I don't find **Crumb**'s stuff vulgar. It's really so far estranged from vulgarity that it is a caricature of vulgar. Anti-vulgar. VOID INDIGO looked vulgar. I didn't bother to read it but I browsed it. It's a funny thing, how in the creative stage something can look good to the creators, the editors, and then when it's printed it's a whole different thing. Like it changed. That's why Marvel pulled INDIGO.

JACK: *Recently, you came down pretty hard on communism. .*

BOB: I don't consider communism any more valid a political movement than the easter bunny or horticulture. Communism is a cast off philosophy of placebo logic for thread-bare intellects. You make a big mistake when you sit down with or take seriously kooks and misfits who otherwise probably wouldn't take themselves seriously. That's why prayer got kicked out of school. If whatever her name was had been laughed at instead of being taken seriously, she would have picked on something else

JACK: *How do you feel about prayer in school?*

BOB: I think it has always been a smart fashion, without ever hurting anyone too bad or leading to public institutions being overrun with Jesuits and the like. I would certainly rather see a class day or a ceremony or a meal opened with prayer than some things. It's a lot better than nothing. It's like taking a bath. One bath a day is not too much to ask. You can't ask people in our society to not bathe at all or to bathe twenty or thirty times a day. It's an accepted social convention. I am not a religious person myself. I know my God as every good man. When I was very young, I was non-religious. If I went to a Moslem country I would not be offended by Moslem prayers in school. I have never considered democracy an optimum method of determining anything. You might say I don't believe in it, at least not religiously, as some people do. But you don't see me going down and picketing the poll booths every election day and trying to get it repealed as an accepted act of society!

Getting prayer kicked out of school was as ridiculous as kicking non-Christians or atheists out of public school. I'll tell you one thing, prayer will be back in school in a New York minute and you won't hear any more about it, if five or six of these anti-pray activist leaders are struck by lightning all in the same week. Wouldn't that be strange!

Hey, I say, "prayer, if it's good enough for God, it's good enough for our schools."

JACK: *Getting back to the CARROT, let's talk about "Ut" for a second. The Flaming Carrot says "Ut". What the hell is "Ut"? What does it mean? Nothing?*

BOB: That's hard. "Ut" is something like, "Ut! Look!"

I'll tell you who said it. At Shea Stadium, when the **Beatles** were all up there, and the fans were trying to rush the stage, and the police were trying to keep

Give me floppy dirty cash any day."

them behind the barricades, **George Harrison** points to one that gets through, and says, "Ut!" It's like OOPS! It's just a goofy thing that's kind of childlike and fun. Like a little kid who's trying to get all his puppies in a box, and one gets out, and he goes, "Ut!"

JACK: *It's a tribute to your — let's be modest — creative genius that probably everyone in the universe says "Ut!" but you're the first one who's written it down.*

BOB: Yeah? That's interesting. It gives the character of the Carrot away in one fell swoop. Like the scene where he shoots the guy for the evidence, an old sock filled with toothpaste. It's not a joke, it doesn't have a punchline, but it's funny, nonetheless. If I'd have come up with that idea in Hollywood, I'd have made twenty or thirty thousand dollars on it! Whole movies are based on one little gem of an idea like that, and in the FLAMING CARROT, we've got little gems like that on every page!

JACK: *Speaking of gems, a new character made his debut in issue #13 that I find fascinating, called — of all things — the Red Donut. This guy has a body shaped like a donut, he wears a bucket on his head, he popped into existence out of nowhere with his suitcase already packed, and he talks to people through a wallet that has John Agar in it!*

BOB: A picture of **John Agar** in it.

JACK: *A picture of John Agar in it! How? Why? I mean, everybody has seen these old wallets at flea markets that you used to see in dimestores, but you take a wonderful reminiscence like that, and you built it into a character.*

BOB: That's a good example. That's a good question about this particular subject, coming up with these off-the-wall things. I came up with the Red Donut about two or three years ago, and I decided to do something a little quirky. So I said, why not a wallet with a picture in it that can translate the Red Donut into English, because this guy's obviously not only from another planet, he's from another universe.

JACK: *A parallel universe, or a perpendicular one?*

BOB: *(Laughter.) Some* kind of odd universe! Anyway, I was trying to figure out who to put in the wallet, and I made this list of names of different people who might fit, and none of them fit. So, I called up **Rod Whigham**, who does G.I.JOE: he lives about half a mile from here, and he came up with **John Agar**. He was married to **Shirley Temple** for a while, or something like that, and then he became a wife-beater or something. So this was

kind of an odd thing, and it was like, "Who's **John Agar?**"

JACK: *Then you think, "Oh, yeah! He's the guy in the wallet!"*

BOB: Right, exactly. A classic example of somebody with his picture in a wallet, from another era, the left-over stuff in K-Mart.

JACK: *Is there some sort of cosmic relationship between the Red Donut and John Agar, or is this as far as it goes?*

BOB: No, just the serendipity of the thing. He could've grabbed a wallet with somebody else's picture in it. **Lorne Greene**...

JACK: *...or Cyd Charisse.*

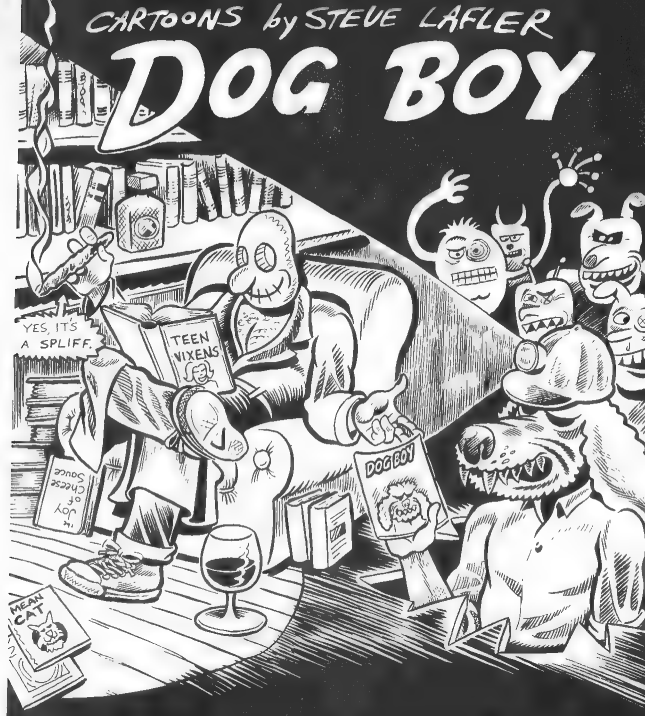
BOB: Yeah, she would've been good, too. One of my big problems is that the Carrot does suffer to some extent because I don't have anybody to brainstorm with, to bounce ideas off of. I'd like to see the old studio system come back. It gets lonely when you work alone. Working with other artists would be like being on a ball team or a movie crew or a band. Pretty girls would drop by the office to get autographs or get drawn into the comics. Beautiful models or even famous actresses.

You know, strippers read comic books more than any other demographic group! I mean, they are familiar with it and know what's going on. Over the years, I've noticed this. It sounds like I'm making it up — but I'd say it's pretty true.

JACK: *Strippers?*

BOB: Hell, I was in the Million Dollar Club out in Dallas last year with an old roommate who lives there now, and he knows some of the girls, so they talk to us. Well, I keep the fact that I draw comics under my hat most of the time, but my buddy makes it well known, 'cause he wants to get all the attention — see, he's a rascal, but it boomerangs. Within fifteen minutes I'm in the dressing room drawing on all their T-shirts with a magic marker one of the girls has rustled up. Now I'm a little crocked, and real tired out after the weekend and the con there in Dallas, so pretty soon I'm doing this real loose, loopy stuff. Probably really ruined some of the shirts, but I say that I am a modern artist also and these are real beautiful abstracts and will be valuable if I sign them.

Well, soon I have about ten shirts to draw on, and I'm sitting in front of this



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"This bouncer gave me the bum's rush."

mirror with all these pop bulbs around it where they check their make-up, and as I'm talking and drawing, I see this cockroach running across the make-up table. I keep on talking and grab a glamour magazine and wack it just as I'm making a point. Well, they think I'm showing a little artistic rage and are in awe, so I start giving one of my speeches and drawing as I do, and I'm drawing like a maestro conducting an orchestra (you see, I have a pizza box inside the shirt so I can draw on it; the shirt is stretched over a pizza box). It was quite a scene, until word got around and this bouncer in a black suit came in and gave me and my pal the bum's rush.

JACK: *That's quite a scene.*

BOB: I'll tell you, Jack, they should have a film crew follow me around through the days of my life. It would be a great TV show. They spend millions making a presidential library complex for **Jimmy Carter** and they don't even give me a baloney sandwich. I'm ten times more important to this country than that buck-toothed carpetbagger and all my important papers are in a cardboard box I got at the grocery store. But you know what?

JACK: *What?*

BOB: I think it's kind of glamourous to keep all that stuff in a cardboard box. I mean, someday, when this **Carter** library is just a filling station, that cardboard box will be in the Smithsonian with a little sign on it: "This cardboard box once held **Bob Burden**'s important papers." Right next to the Spirit of St. Louis, no doubt. And you know what?

JACK: *What?*

BOB: We got off the subject. You'll probably want to chop that last twenty paragraphs . . .

JACK: *We were talking about . . . ?*

BOB: The studio system and what it would do for comics. It would be good to try. Everyone working together, helping one another. Get paid at the end of each day. It would be great to finish a page and go turn it in at a little window and get paid in cash. Waiting three months is demoralizing. And "checks in the mail"? What a *cliche!* I want cash. That's the man's way to do it. Checks are so dainty and feminine. Give me floppy dirty cash anyday. The bucks.

These publishers wanted to give me ten grand last summer for the reprint rights to the first ten CARROTS and I told them I wanted it delivered in a briefcase in small bills and I haven't heard from them since.

Along the lines of that studio idea, **Rod Whigham** came over and helped me get out the first issue of the FLAMING CARROT, the one-shot back in 1981. He did backgrounds, and sometimes whole panels in that first issue

JACK: *Was he credited?*

BOB: Yeah. Doing that first issue was like that **Marx Brothers** movie where they've got this big locomotive, and they start tearing down the walls of the thing and throwing it in the burner, just to keep the thing going. There was Zip-a-Tone all over the carpet, and the place looked like a slaughter-house for art.

JACK: *Was it worth it?*

BOB: Oh, yeah! One of the good things about the Carrot is that it makes you happy, it has a therapeutic effect. People enjoy it, they laugh out loud, and the world is a little less dark of a place.

NEXT ISSUE: Bob Burden reveals his secret of seduction, gives his opinion on the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby controversy, and talks freely about his alleged affair with Nancy Reagan.

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"It's a matter of persevering until you have some luck."

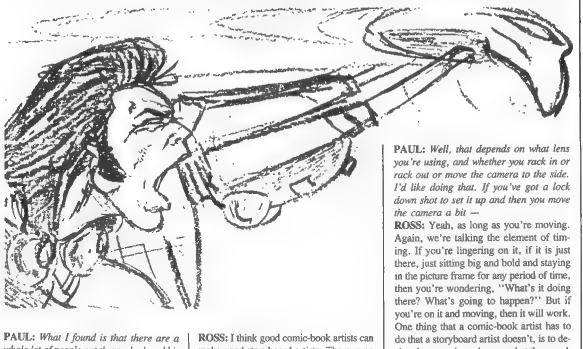
DAVE DARRIGO & DAVE ROSS

© 1988 Dave Darrigo

Last issue, our Hollywood correspondent — movie artist Paul Power (himself the subject of an interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #33) — went on location to Toronto, Canada, where he met up with Dave Darrigo, writer/creator of Renegade's WORDSMITH, and Dave Ross, artist of Marvel's ALPHA FLIGHT.

His dialogue with the dual Daves (featuring a cameo by local artist Ron Hobbs) ranged all the way from the genesis of WORDSMITH to what's wrong with ALPHA FLIGHT. Here in part two, the partying at a sushi bar continues, as the conversation turns to comics storytelling versus movie storyboarding, animation, the kind of women Puck would like, and all about opportunity and ALPHA FLIGHT. Dave Darrigo has just used Stan Lee as an example of "a comic writer who always wanted to do something more serious" and be respected for it, but who stayed in comics and enjoyed it...

"I hit the roof because Pacific wouldn't



PAUL: *What I found is that there are a whole lot of people out there who loved his stuff with Jack Kirby. I was talking to Peter Weir, the director, about this as well, and he really got off on those comics — that spark and creativity. There are a lot of film makers that I've worked with who really got a great buzz out of those early Marvels. What about films in relation to comics? How do you guys feel about that? Is there a relationship?*

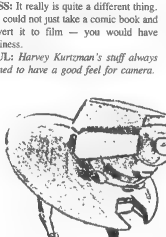
ROSS: Well, they both involve storytelling.

PAUL: *You've done film and animation storyboards — how do you feel about the transition?*

ROSS: It really is quite a different thing. You could not just take a comic book and convert it to film — you would have craziness.

PAUL: *Harvey Kurtzman's stuff always seemed to have a good feel for camera.*

ROSS: I think good comic-book artists can make good storyboard artists. There is no doubt about that. If you have an eye for setting up shots, if you understand when to use particular types of angles, what they denote automatically to people and what they don't, then you'll be very valuable in that line. For instance, little things in timing can make so much difference. You can do a shot in a comic book that looks very nice with a lamp in the foreground on a table just as a framing element — it doesn't mean anything to the story, it just adds a sense of depth to the set. But if you do that in a film and linger on that lamp for too long, you're misdirecting the audience, because people are going to be waiting for a hand to reach out and turn it on, or something to knock it over.



"I was trying to get a film off the ground called BIRTHRIGHTS." Sultan, the Flying Robe & other early character sketches from Dave's film proposal.

PAUL: *Well, that depends on what lens you're using, and whether you rack in or rack out or move the camera to the side. I'd like doing that. If you've got a lock down shot to set it up and then you move the camera a bit —*

ROSS: Yeah, as long as you're moving. Again, we're talking the element of timing. If you're lingering on it, if it is just there, just sitting big and bold and staying in the picture frame for any period of time, then you're wondering, "What's it doing there? What's going to happen?" But if you're on it and moving, then it will work. One thing that a comic-book artist has to do that a storyboard artist doesn't, is to design the pages in such a way that they work as pages — each of them works as a composition in and of itself and, of course, ideally knowing which pages are butting up against which, to design a page arrangement so that each flows into the next, and that's a matter of directing the reader's eye through negative space and using lighting and elements and angles in certain ways, moving from one panel to the next.

PAUL: *When I first met you in L.A., Bill Wray was inking a couple of samples of a character, and I saw some color storyboards from you that were really quite nice. What was that done for? I never really found out. That was in what — '80 or '82?*

ROSS: That was indirectly what spurred me into getting into comic books. At that time I had just finished up working at Nelvana studios up here. That was around '81. I left Nelvana to pursue a project of my own.

PAUL: *What were you doing at Nelvana?*

ROSS: I was doing storyboards and layouts for ROCK AND RULE.

PAUL: *What did you think of that movie in the end? Did you see it?*

ROSS: Yeah, I did see it. I liked part of it, and I thought parts of it were confusing — and when a person who has worked on it finds parts of it to be confusing, then there must be some general confusion. If anybody should know the story, it's somebody that has worked on it. I did know the whole story, but I found I was still wondering why characters were doing such and such and how did they get from here to there in cer-

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let me number the pages of AVALONE."

tain situations — and that was just a matter of cuts. Apparently, **Roger Zelazny** did the original plot. He was in at the beginning or very close to the beginning, but I can't talk much about that because I *wasn't* there at the beginning. This is what I heard from people who had been there when I started working.

PAUL: *Did you get a credit?*

ROSS: Oh, yes. They were very good about credits. They gave people credits who had not worked on the whole project, but came in part way through, like me, but they still got the credit. If they worked there any length of time, they got credit, and that's super.

PAUL: *Those sample pages I saw — did you ever finish that story?*

ROSS: Oh, it was finished as a story, but not as a comic book. It was a proposal for a film — I was trying to get a film off the ground called BIRTHRIGHTS.

The BIRTHRIGHTS proposal was what actually got me into comics, and it happened in kind of a roundabout way. After I had been down in California banging on doors and getting lukewarm response, I got back to New York and was talking to some folks in comics because I had some interest in them, and I played at drawing comics a bit.

PAUL: *In California, didn't you get a warm response from Roy Thomas? Because the last time I saw you, you were going to his house.*

ROSS: Yes, definitely, but nothing came of it at the time. In fact, he scarcely remembered me when we got together to do some work last year. But that's understandable, of course. The very first material I showed was set up as a slide show — about 160 color slides that I put together, and I showed them to the folks over at Continuity. **Neal Adams** was quite interested in doing something as a comic — not a film. At this point in time, we weren't discussing it as film any more. EPIC was a consideration at one point, too. Obviously, nothing came out of it directly, but I did get a very good response on it.

PAUL: *After your first year of ALPHA FLIGHT, you'll get a following, and people will say, "What else can this guy do?", and you'll go, "Well, I just happen to have."*

ROSS: Of course, there's still AVALONE, and there's all sorts of stuff that's been plotted and produced already on AVALONE, stuff that's still on the drawing board as it were. AVALONE could have a very good future if it gets back off the ground.

PAUL: *Did Eclipse have a chance at it?*

ROSS: Oh, sure, they did. As everyone knows, there was a glut of material suddenly up for grabs when Pacific went under. AVALONE had seen print in the back of one issue of **Will Meugniot**'s VANITY. In that one issue, it had the misfortune of having two pages out of order — you couldn't even read it properly.

PAUL: *How did you feel about that?*

ROSS: I hit the roof because we had already had a discussion with them — I wouldn't call it an argument, but a discussion — about the numbering of pages. I wasn't allowed to number the pages because it was the back-up story in the book. They wanted the whole book numbered pagewise from beginning to end, and since they didn't know what page my story was going to start on, I couldn't number them. So I wanted to, but they wouldn't let me . . .

PAUL: *Not even in blue?*

ROSS: No. So it was a mess, and I can't believe it in terms of proofreading — they obviously didn't proofread it. If they had attempted to, then they would have seen it right away.

PAUL: *With ALPHA FLIGHT, what's going to happen with the characters?*

ROSS: Well, Bill wants to focus a little more attention on some of the characters like Box, Puck, and the new Guardian. He's sort of leaving the situation between Northstar and Aurora and that whole thing about Aurora's split personality in a stable state for a while. He felt there was an awful lot of emphasis on those characters in the previous issues, and so we're going to focus on others. Mostly, they're going to be working as a group, which is something they haven't been doing in the past, and I think that is something that the readers wanted to see happen. I want to get into some fun by showing little human things — You can do little things — funny, crazy little things that will remind the readers that we're dealing with real people. And one of the things is that these are a group of people who are living under one roof, they come from all different backgrounds — they will all have their own rooms in the mansion on Tamarind Island, but there will be a communal kitchen, and imagine the

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"Bill Mantlo & I are thinking about what

Two scenes from AVALONE.

chaos in the morning — seven or eight of them in the kitchen . . .

PAUL: *And only one bathroom. (Laughter.)*

ROSS: Maybe two, but there will be line-ups, you better believe it. But to throw in little snippets like that now and then of things happening — just everyday sort of stuff of a bunch of people boarding together in one limited space, and having to deal with the inevitable pressures — little pressures that come up without dwelling on it, but it being there for a panel or two and then on with the plot, or action, or whatever else is going on with the story — little things like that now and then.

PAUL: *Which I like, because they used to deal with that in the early X-MEN — the Lee/Kirby/Stone stuff. Things would happen over the dinner table, which I really liked, and you do have that when people live together, then you find out who presses on the toothpaste the wrong way, and these little things piss you off.*

ROSS: Providing you don't dwell on it, it's great — it should be there, and I think we're going to aim for more of that because Bill's all for it, as well. I missed a great opportunity in issue #36. Shaman comes into the mansion in his new costume, complete with boots, and he's been walking all around in the snow. He's walking around inside of this place, and he's got his boots on. Well, it might have been sort of fun to have one of the characters lambaste him. "What are you wearing boots inside for? Who's going to clean up this mess?" *(Laughter.)* Little things like that bring you right back down to earth and say that these are a bunch of real people. There are going to be some crazy things happening, but they're real. One of the things that Bill and I are going to give some thought to is coming up with what the characters would do in their spare time, when they're not busy saving the world, or being Alphans, or worrying about the problems that have obsessed the team in the past — all these personal problems. What do they do for recreation? Is Puck inclined to read a book or go to a bar — or do both at the same time?

PAUL: *What kind of women would Puck like? That's what I want to know.*

ROSS: Yeah, what's his taste in women?

PAUL: *Dave is smiling back there.*

DARRIGO: I know what kind of women he would like if you're any indication.

ROSS: Yes, knowing Paul's taste in women, we can extrapolate. But I think that needs to be done — just to sit down and say, "What would these characters do? What would Aurora do — what suits her fancy when she has some time off?" The imagination can run wild with that lady.

PAUL: *That's why I like the idea of you doing the book. You're concerned with acting.*

ROSS: It's vital.

PAUL: *You're acting with a pencil, same as when Dave Darrigo is writing WORD-SMITH. He's concerned with this person's mood in working in this fantasy genre for a living, and how it's affected his own personal life. It's like a split personality. I like that overlap of reality.*

ROSS: We all have to have that professional side and that personal side to us, and one of the things that I was checking with Bill on, I was saying, "These people are being funded, correct?" That means that it's almost become a job — they're full time Alphans now.

PAUL: *Who finances them?*

ROSS: The Canadian government. They now have full financing, in fact the government was supposed to have gone in and rebuilt the mansion after it had been gutted in an earlier story — they literally rebuilt it from the inside out.

PAUL: *Will you guys be consulting with John Byrne on any of this, or is he completely out of the picture?*

ROSS: I would love to. I don't know how much he has left in his head that he hasn't put down in his twenty-eight issues. And

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the characters do in their spare time."

he said himself when he left, that he was leaving because he basically had done all the stories he wanted to do with them, and yet on the other hand you can see in certain situations where some things have been left up in the air by John about some characters — all the questions haven't been answered. But I don't know if that's necessarily a bad thing to leave, in that I think sometimes it takes away from a character if you end up filling them out too much — answering all the questions about every snippet and detail of their past.

PAUL: *What characters are you talking about?*

ROSS: Puck. How much do we know about Puck's background? Little things were hinted at in the issues that John did, but there's so much more that can be filled out there. We don't know a heck of a lot about Northstar — there's that inference about the dealing with the terrorist group, the F.L.Q., but to what degree? What's it all about? That has to be filled out.

PAUL: *Do you have any ideas on that?*

ROSS: I think in both those cases, certain things have been fleshed out and perhaps dealt with in the issues between when John left the book and I took over, but there are other things. What about Box — Roger Bochs? He's been introduced, but there hasn't been that much said. Something we know about him is that he designed the robot as a toy before Hudson got involved in the picture and helped him turn that toy into a real working weapon.

PAUL: *They are two very interesting characters.*

ROSS: But they're completely left up in the air. The basic groundwork for the characters has been given, and they need to be filled out. But as I say — not to the degree that it takes away a certain dramatic element, an element of mystery from the characters.

DARRIGO: Well it hasn't hurt the X-MEN, has it?

PAUL: *With all due respect to Chris Claremont — and by the same token, don't fuck with a good thing — but everything has been done, and I find that you end up regurgitating some. That's what I find scary about a continuing series — TV soap operas, you find out everything about them — what do you do in the end? You hit a point where it's "I've said it all, I've done it," and they have to kill those characters off. How do you feel about X-MEN — what's happening now?*

DARRIGO: Well I was going to say that in television the answer they usually come up with is that they introduce new members to the supporting cast.

ROSS: They've done it in X-MEN, and

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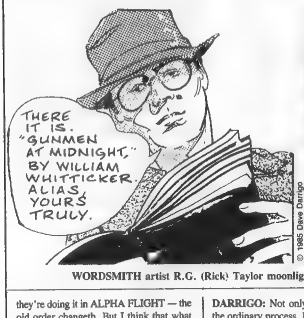
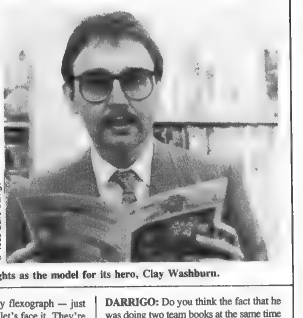
"Byrne didn't get out beyond the characters."





WORDSMITH artist R.G. (Rick) Taylor moonlights as the model for its hero, Clay Washburn.

they're doing it in ALPHA FLIGHT — the old order changeth. But I think that what you reveal of the characters should be revealed very gradually over the time and in stories revolving around situations that do not deal directly with the character's hidden backgrounds, and their hidden powers. When you do too much of that, it's like you're shooting your whole load too early in the game — you do it gradually over time — let a bunch of stories happen. John Byrne said that he has run out of stories; well, I can think of a million he hasn't told.

PAUL: *Because you're new and fresh on it.*

ROSS: Sure, of course. But he didn't get out beyond the characters very much. There's all sorts of wild things. I've got a story idea using Toronto's C.N. Tower as an extortion device — setting up this tracking system around the tower and having it aimed at the entire city and using it to hold the whole city at bay, and basically Alpha Flight would come and have to retake the tower from these characters.

PAUL: *How tall is that tower? It's the largest free standing structure in the country.*

RON HOBBS: A couple hundred feet short of 2000 feet.

PAUL: *Ron Hobbs has joined us — another Canadian cartoonist/illustrator.*

ROSS: There's all sorts of visuals that haven't been explored. I love to work with urban settings. I love city stuff and particularly night scenes in terms of straight visuals, and I hope to play around with that sort of thing if I get the chance

DARRIGO: If you only had the printing process to back you up.

ROSS: If they could only get solid blacks in flexo, instead of those murky, muddy greys.

DARRIGO: Not only flexograph — just the ordinary process, let's face it. They're always out to put out a cheap product, and now the prices are going up again.

PAUL: *I don't know why, because...in the Forties...did you see those old comic strips like the original PRINCE VALIANT Sunday pages? They used to drop in tints and things. What you have to do is — and I don't know if Marvel would do it — you have to pay your colorist more and hire more colorists, and say, "Hey, I want a painter working on this, I want someone who really understands color to use this."*

RON: Disney has its own school to teach its illustrators, and you actually go through color theory and all the fundamentals you would think you'd need. Why don't comic companies set up a little "after hours" class for their own people?

PAUL: *I knew Disney had a life-drawing class, but I didn't know about the color stuff.*

RON: You were talking about characters and revealing characters, pasts — I think what's missing is not so much revealing, but evolving. Why not have characters change the way people do, and have them, mature?

PAUL: *I think what happened with ALPHA FLIGHT is that John Byrne realized that he hit this point where...I mean he was a very busy man, trying to take care of the FF and then the HULK, and he said, "Hey, let's do a trade off." And a whole new team comes in with a whole new set of ideas. It would be nice, even if you owned a character, to back off completely and just oversee it as an editor and let other writers come in —*

DARRIGO: Do you think the fact that he was doing two team books at the same time might have burned him out? As a writer, doing two, you have to put yourself in a "team mode" of thinking and so...

PAUL: *Pressure was on him — writing, pencils, inks. He was doing an intense job — I think the conflict of doing all that...*

DARRIGO: He couldn't come up with new stories possibly because he had used a lot of that thinking on FANTASTIC FOUR, and so he was thinking, with ALPHA FLIGHT, to try something different as far as a team book, because on the FF he used up a lot of the cliches and a lot of the other formulas that are used on a team book.

PAUL: *What would you like to do with the superhero genre? What would you do it you were at Marvel, and what would you like to tackle?*

DARRIGO: Well, let's just say I'm more attracted to characters that haven't been properly utilized. I've mentioned to you about Captain America, and I have some ideas I'd like to use on that character which I think would suit it very well.

PAUL: *Would you still be keeping with the original concept?*

DARRIGO: Yes, definitely.

PAUL: *Can you give us an example?*

DARRIGO: It's hard to do that and give out something like that because you never know what's going to happen, but I would like to get Captain America back to fighting for freedom, democracy, liberty, and all the things he stood for, which he doesn't do whatsoever to any extent now, and I think it's a total waste of a character.

RON: What are you going to do, send him to Nicaragua or something?

"I have some ideas about Captain America."

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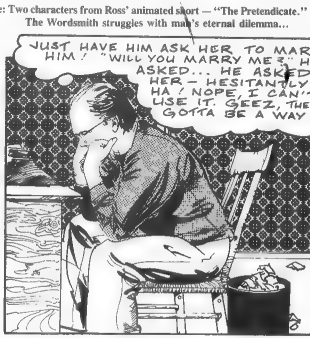
DARRIGO: My idea would not have him set in the present.
RON: World War II?
DARRIGO: No.
PAUL: *He's told me this, and I think it's a really good idea, and I think Marvel should drop him a letter and find out about it, because if the book is on its last legs, then this might be good. It's a great concept, and we'll leave it at that. Any last comments from you guys?*
ROSS: I'd like to dabble in the writing, as so many artists who get into the comic business do — they get drawing first because they have ideas and they're frustrated at their inability to put their ideas on paper, so learning to draw is their way of alleviating the frustration. And it's not surprising that so many getting into the business have their own ideas, concepts and characters. Whether or not they're ever going to get a chance to see if those characters and concepts are viably marketable is another matter, and maybe some of them should never see print. Chances are some of the ones I've come up with should never see print *(laughter)*, and that's good, but maybe some others will, sometime. The only thing about that is that you sometimes get yourself in a position to do this idea — maybe you've had an idea in the back of your head for a long time and you think it's a super idea, and you are finally in a position to do it — and you start to flesh it out, and you realize *it doesn't work*! But, I'd certainly be happy to get involved with some of that stuff at some point in the future. But for now, ALPHA FLIGHT is new and fresh to me, and I'm having a ball with it. When I get into it, and I get ideas down on paper, I'm always excited.
PAUL: *What about you, Dave?*
DARRIGO: Listening to Dave, I always think about how people in this business, and related businesses, are always limited by the fact that they have to do work to pay the rent and yet everyone, it seems, is always full of ideas that they would like to do that will never see the light of day. Ultimately, that's the enjoyment — to work in comics as a career as long as possible and develop as many of these ideas as you can. I think all of us here would have loved to have been in the shoes of **Lee & Kirby** back in the early Marvel days, because that was a time when they sat down, and practically any idea that they had was seeing print. Somebody should ask **Jack Kirby** or **Stan Lee** if there weren't very many ideas that never saw the light of day — it would be interesting to see. That's the kind of thing that Dave and I and most other people who might be reading this interview always have in the back of their minds, we wonder, "Am I ever going to get another idea out besides this one?" or in Dave's case, "Am I gonna get one out on my own?" There are people reading this, and they're thinking, "Am I ever going to get just *one* idea out?" You have to build your skills — hone your skills, and it's a matter of persevering and keeping at it until you have some luck on your side.

Above: Two characters from Ross' animated short — "The Pretendicate." Below: The Wordsmith struggles with man's eternal dilemma...


JUST HAVE HIM ASK HER TO MARRY HIM! "WILL YOU MARRY ME?" HE ASKED... HE ASKED HER — HESITANTLY. HA! NOPE, I CAN'T USE IT. GEEZ, THERE'S GOTTA BE A WAY!

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"I'm going to be a publisher and crush

BILL MARKS

You may have met Bill Marks last month when he tagged along as Marty Herzog interviewed Dean Motter. Or you may have read about Bill Marks in COMICS JOURNAL, but the less said about that, the better. He is, of course, the publisher of the Vortex Comics line, which is what all the yelling is about. So, how does a rising young megalomaniac without delusions of grandeur — to twist his own words — end up publishing such avant-garde and diverse titles as THOSE ANNOYING POST BROTHERS, STIG'S INFERNO, MISTER X and so on? Marty decided to find out, so let's rejoin him, in a manner of speaking...

MARTY HERZOG: *What's a Bill Marks?*

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: William Paul Marks III

Born: 10 April 1962 — Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Occupation: Publisher of Vortex Comics

Likes: British Sports Cars, Motorcycles, Sailboats, Travel, Leather Jackets

Favorite Movie: REPO MAN

Favorite Italian Food: Tortellini in a Basil Alfredo Sauce with Grated Truffles

BILL MARKS: Bill Marks had quite a normal upbringing — aside from the fact that I was somewhat megalomaniacal and some people considered me to be a bit of a go-getter. When I was twelve I delivered 400 papers every morning. I had all of the apartment buildings in my neighborhood sewn up. I bought my first car when I was fifteen; it sat in the garage until I was old enough to drive it. *(Laughter.)* I would just sit in it and back it down the driveway to the end of the driveway and then drive it back into the garage. *(Laughter.)* Once I could actually drive my car, then I bought another car that didn't run, so that it would sit in the garage in its place. I owned that car that didn't run until...

MARTY: *You had two cars when you were sixteen?*

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the spirits of artists everywhere!''

Publisher Bill Marks demonstrates Vortex Comics' Open Door Policy.

BILL: Yeah. I had a 1968 Ford Country Sedan and a 1964 Austin-Healy 3000 Mark III. I bet you can't guess which one didn't run. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *And this is from the paper route?*

BILL: These are from paper routes. You deliver 400 papers every morning for five years and you can make a lot of money at it. It paid for a trip to Italy in 1975. I had the great good fortune to go back to Italy just last year as a comics professional to the Lucca Comics Convention where I was treated to the hospitality and...

MARTY: *Isn't he skipping ahead?*

BILL: ...pleasantries of the Italian comics professionals.

MARTY: *Did I ask him about that?*

BILL: I told you I was a good interview.

MARTY: *I'm gonna go watch some sports.*

BILL: And I'll just talk! *(Laughter.)* So anyhow, I had those two cars. I just sold the Austin-Healy earlier this summer. I think I drove it all of two blocks in the five years that I owned it. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Was there ever a comic book in your life?*

BILL: Oh, yes. I've been a massive Doctor Strange fan since seeing my first **Steve Ditko** STRANGE TALES — half an issue of Doctor Strange and half an issue of Nick Fury. Who knows who did Nick Fury back then? It was probably still **Jack Kirby**. And right up through all of those beautiful **Steranko** issues of NICK FURY. I stuck with DOCTOR STRANGE and it's been my favorite mainstream comic book from that day on. Still is.

MARTY: *Did you at any time in your life aspire to be a writer or an artist or were you always thinking about being a publisher?*

BILL: Well, it's funny, because I've always wanted to own an empire. I used to try and think of people who I thought really influenced my viewpoint of life. I always ended up with people like **Howard Hughes, Hugh Hefner, Aristotle Onassis,** and **Nelson Rockefeller.**

MARTY: *So where did you see yourself in this illusion?*

BILL: The last thing I ever expected to be doing when I was sixteen was publishing comic books or owning an art studio. Once, when I was a small child, my art teacher came in and took the art-

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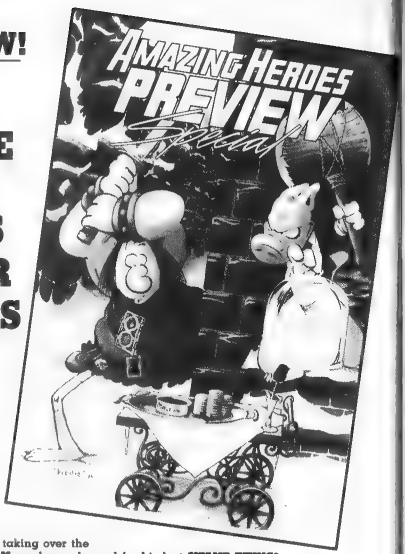

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"I ended up with Hefner, Onassis, Rockefeller."

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work out of my hands and told me that I had no talent as an artist whatsoever. I looked up and vowed to the gods, "If I can't be an artist then nobody can!" *(Laughter.)* "When I grow up I'm gonna be a publisher and I'm going to crush the spirits of artists and creativity everywhere!" *(Laughter.)* No, I loved the art classes. I absolutely loved my art classes in school. I had a wonderful time going to them and I had a great time doing all of the art history and looking at the works of the great masters. But I can't draw a straight line. I was having so much fun looking at everybody else's art. I had a great time seeing all of this artwork being done, but I've never been a good artist. So I've tended to live vicariously through other people's artwork ever since then. I like to think of my spiritual guidance moving Dean's hand across the page sometimes.

MARTY: *Dean Motter, your partner...*

DEAN MOTTER: ...in crime.

MARTY: *We'll talk about the Hernandez Brothers later; don't talk about crime now. (Laughter.) Fine, so you delivered papers and were a Doctor Strange fan. Where did it go from there?*

BILL: Well, I had a fairly typical teenagehood. Teenagehood?

MARTY: *That was a couple of years ago.*

BILL: Yeah. That was quite recent. I think we should point out that, obviously, I am quite young. But you know, when I was sixteen it was girls and cars — fast girls and sexy cars. I was having quite a normal youth until I bumped into this fellow that invited me to a science-fiction convention one day. I'll never forgive him for doing that.

MARTY: *Who was that?*

BILL: It was a fellow named **Kevin Davies**. He's a local Toronto artist who is supposed to, actually, have a book coming out from WaRP Graphics, the people who do ELFQUEST, in the not-too-distant future.

MARTY: *So Kevin invited you to a science-fiction convention.*

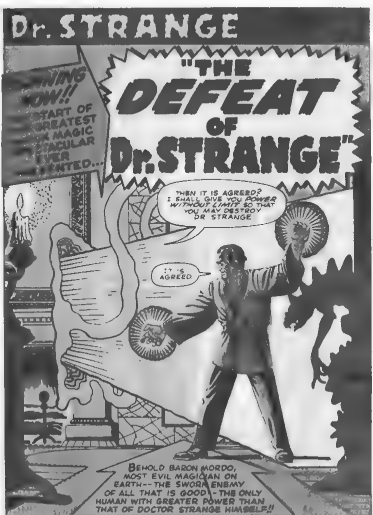
BILL: Yeah It was the Toronto STAR TREK Convention in 1976.

MARTY: *I was the press and public relations director for that!*

BILL: And I was just, like, some snotty-nosed kid that was sort of hangin' around. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *So you went to the STAR TREK convention.*

BILL: Yeah. And I should backtrack because, of course, I'd been reading comic books since I was a kid, right. You know, old FANTASTIC FOURs and SPIDER-MANs and AVENGERS and all kinds of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things like that. I'd sort of gotten out of it for a few years. I used to pick up DOCTOR STRANGE at the corner store. It was the only comic book I continued to buy.

MARTY: *That didn't have that childrens' stigma or...*

BILL: Well, it's like I wouldn't show it to my friends, right. We'd be roaring down the back alleyways of Dawn Mills, Ontario, right, in my huge Ford station-wagon with all of the shag carpeting and pillows in the back and a plastic skull glued to the hood, right, and there'd be a scattering of DOCTOR STRANGE comics throughout the back of the car, right. *(Laughter.)* I still have visions of this sort of thing. But I wouldn't show my friends them or anything. I discovered there was a shop in Toronto that sold a lot of comic books, Bakka Books, and I got to know some of the people there quite well. One of the fellows that I got to know rather well there, he opened up Toronto's first comic-book store, a shop called Silver Snail. Subsequently, he published one of the early alternative comic books, a book called ANDROMEDA, and another one called ARIK KHAN; and all of a sudden I was quite interested and intrigued by this. Backtracking into this **Davies** fellow from a couple of years earlier, he started publishing this fanzine called MIRIAD. It was quite an ambitious fanzine. It was all typeset and it was offset printed and they put a lot of effort into making it look pretty slick, but they were losing their shirts on it. His other partner got disin-

"I'm publishing this magazine when I'm 17."

volved with it because he couldn't afford to put it out anymore. I moved in under the auspices — as I have so many times since — of whipping it into sound financial shape. So I'm publishing this magazine called **MIRIAD** when I'm seventeen. One of the first things we did was to try to solicit some advertising. The first place I went to was the Molsons brewery. *(Laughter.)*

DEAN: Fantastic! Let's pat him on the back.

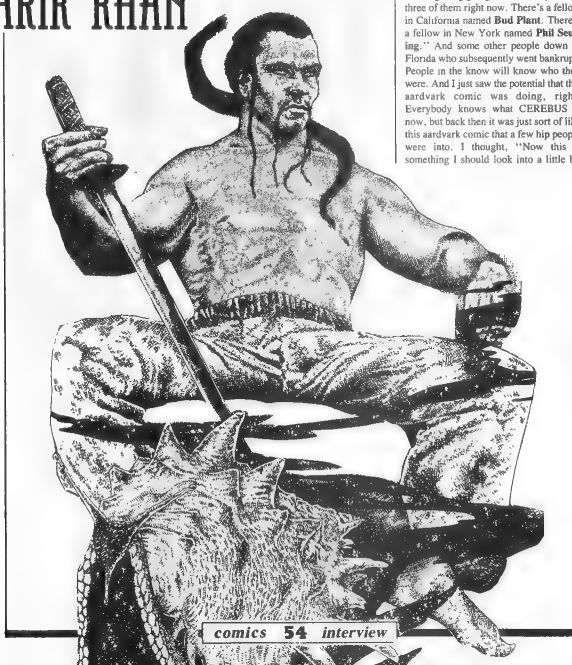
MARTY: *Let's start big!*

BILL: Absolutely. And I walked out of my meeting with Molsons brewery with a full-color glossy cover on it. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *What kind of circulation?*

BILL: Well, we were looking at about 5,000 or 6,000 copies by this time. Then it started to snowball. We did an article on this comic book that was coming out of Kitchener, had about twelve or thirteen issues out at this time. It was this thing called CEREBUS. We did a big cover article with a painting of Cerebus on the cover in full-color and a beer ad on the back cover, and by this time the whole magazine was glossy throughout. Looked pretty sharp. Had some rough edges but I'm still quite proud of it, considering how old I was at the time. This issue with this aardvark on the cover sold incredibly well. All of these people from the United States were ordering 500 or 600 copies. I had to go back to press. All of a sudden we had sold 9,000 copies...because we put an aardvark on the cover. So these people from California were ordering, like, 500 copies and selling and ordering some more. I figured, "Well, I gotta find out what's going on here." I talked to my friend at the Silver Snail and he says, "They're independent comic distributors; something that's just sort of getting going. There's only two or three of them right now. There's a fellow in California named **Bud Plant**. There's a fellow in New York named **Phil Seuling**." And some other people down in Florida who subsequently went bankrupt. People in the know will know who they were. And I just saw the potential that this aardvark comic was doing, right. Everybody knows what CEREBUS is now, but back then it was just sort of like this aardvark comic that a few hip people were into. I thought, "Now this is something I should look into a little bit

ARIK KHAN



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"I never completed my high school."

more." We kept publishing the magazine and eventually we cancelled it due to lack of time and some personal differences between myself and Kevin, as you find you get when two people work very closely on a project that nobody really makes much money off of.

MARTY: *A lot of ego — very little personal gratification other than...*

BILL: Yeah, and so it stopped. I had left high school at this point. I never completed my high school education.

MARTY: *A dropout, huh?*

BILL: Yeah, a high school dropout. And I went to work in a comic-book store and shortly thereafter...

MARTY: *That comic-book store wouldn't by any chance be the Silver Snail?*

BILL: Yes, indeed it was. And shortly thereafter I went to work for the distributorship owned by the same fellow, Andromeda Publications, which was just starting up at this time.

MARTY: *And that was Ron Van Leeuwen.*

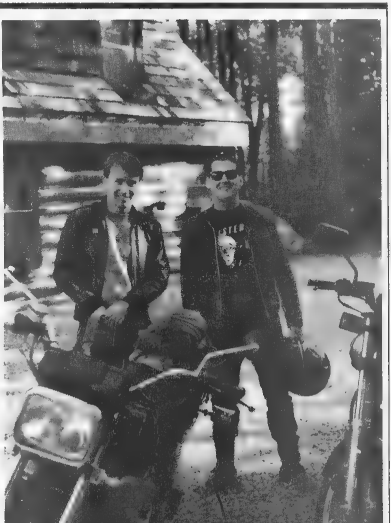
BILL: *Yes.*

MARTY: *If we're gonna drop names then let's drop names.*

BILL: Yes **Ron Van Leeuwen**, another wonderful fellow named **Tom Stormonth**, myself, and one other chap were basically the whole company at that time Ron was the president, Tom was general manager, and I taped the boxes shut. *(Laughter.)* I did that for some time and got to know quite a great deal about the direct sales market, comic wholesaling and retailing; and it was at that time that I decided that I wanted to publish more magazines. I enjoyed publishing MIRIAD a great deal, but I wanted to do it and make money, and comic books were something close to my heart. They had a lot of potential for growth that I could see. I could see a revolution happening. By this time CEREBUS was doing extremely well, ELFQUEST was a runaway success in the bookstores and on the best-seller lists. Eclipse was just starting up and shortly thereafter Pacific Comics started to get quite [illegible]ed the first issue of a black [illegible] anthology comic called VORTEX, which was terrible. It was the worst thing I've ever published. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Who was the editor?*

BILL: Well, I was the editor of the first issue. Basically, I tried to scrape together some people to do artwork for the inside. I cajoled **Ken Steacy** into doing a cover for the magazine. I solicited the orders. I had the thing printed. I packed them into the boxes and, once again, I taped the boxes shut. *(Laughter.)*



Bill Marks (right) in a rare moment of leather and gravel.

MARTY: *Were you still working at Snail at the time?*

BILL: Yes, I was. In fact I continued working there up until about the sixth issue of VORTEX came out.

MARTY: *So in a 'round-a-bout way Snail semi-helped to publish...*

BILL: Well, Ron probably thinks it did. He was constantly getting on my case about making all of these long-distance calls from his place of business. I reimbursed him for them, of course. It seemed kind of strange when **Bud Plant** would call up and say, "Hi, Ron. Is your cashier there?" *(Laughter.)* And Ron would go, "Don't you want to talk to me?" He says, "No, no. I want to talk to Bill." *(Laughter.)* So, I left Ron's employ at the beginning of the summer, having saved up a fair amount of money while I had been working for him, intending to continue to publish VORTEX.

MARTY: *There's a lot of money in used comic books, is there?*

BILL: Yeah, there sure can be. A good, well-run retail operation can do quite well — and distribution, of course, for a well-run operation can also be quite lucrative. But I left and was preparing to start out my second comics venture with some recent acquaintances of mine, a chap nam-

"Dean and Paul and I entered into a

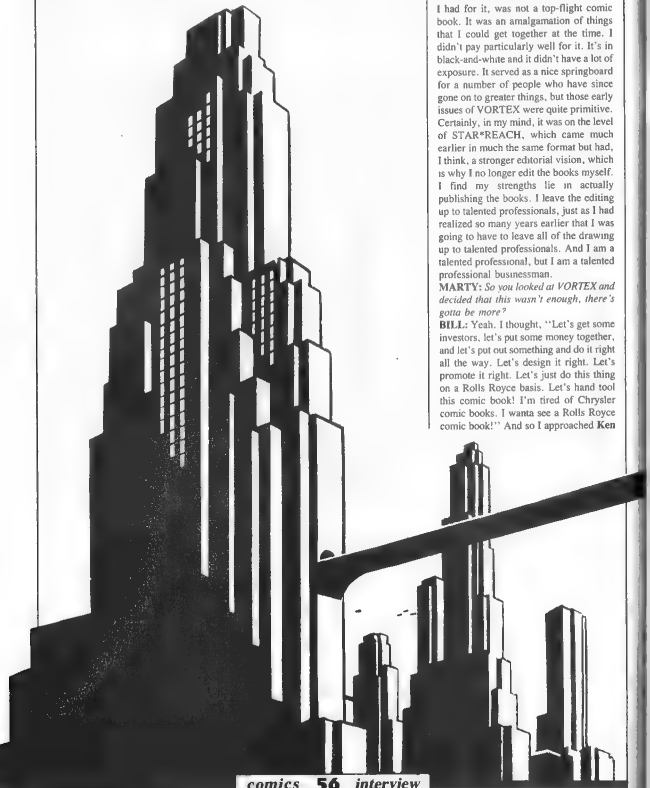
ed **Dean Motter** and another fellow named **Paul Rivoche**, who had been turned onto me. We had crossed paths previously but we didn't really know each other that well. Ken, who I knew rather well by this time, suggested that I see them. I had approached Ken because I wanted to do a really top-flight comic book.

MARTY: *What was VORTEX?*

BILL: VORTEX, for all of the ambitions I had for it, was not a top-flight comic book. It was an amalgamation of things that I could get together at the time. I didn't pay particularly well for it. It's in black-and-white and it didn't have a lot of exposure. It served as a nice springboard for a number of people who have since gone on to greater things, but those early issues of VORTEX were quite primitive. Certainly, in my mind, it was on the level of STAR*REACH, which came much earlier in much the same format but had, I think, a stronger editorial vision, which is why I no longer edit the books myself. I find my strengths lie in actually publishing the books. I leave the editing up to talented professionals, just as I had realized so many years earlier that I was going to have to leave all of the drawing up to talented professionals. And I am a talented professional, but I am a talented professional businessman.

MARTY: *So you looked at VORTEX and decided that this wasn't enough, there's gotta be more?*

BILL: Yeah. I thought, "Let's get some investors, let's put some money together, and let's put out something and do it right all the way. Let's design it right. Let's promote it right. Let's just do this thing on a Rolls Royce basis. Let's hand tool this comic book! I'm tired of Chrysler comic books. I wanta see a Rolls Royce comic book!" And so I approached **Ken**



partnership to produce MIS[illegible]K."

Steacy, who was easily the best comic-book artist I knew personally at the time, and said, "Ken, you could do some brilliant work. I've seen all of this wonderful stuff you were doing on THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE. You should be finished with that sometime soon. What do you say we publish a comic book?" And Ken was saying, "Well, you know, I just had a baby and my wife and I want to buy a house. I sure do agree with your vision on this but I can't afford it. But you know who's got a really sharp idea for a comic book; something that really fits in with what you're talking about? You've met Dean and Paul haven't you?" I said, "I've met 'em but I don't really know them that well." He says, "Well, you should go talk to them." So Ken drags me up to this studio and we talked for awhile. We discussed this character that Paul had done in an illustration for the cover of VORTEX #2, which was this bald-headed guy with glasses in this sort of really neat, radiant, art deco city. And it turns out that Dean and Paul had greater ideas just than to do this painting, and we entered into a partnership to produce MISTER X.

MARTY: *Ken had nothing to do with it?*

BILL: He was a catalyst. He had nothing to do with the actual production of the comic book itself at that stage.

MARTY: *He was at that time editor of VORTEX?*

BILL: Yes. He had taken over recently as editor of the black-and-white VORTEX magazine, resulting in great improvements of the quality of work being seen in VORTEX.

MARTY: *But he had nothing to do with the original MISTER X?*

BILL: No. Ken was the catalyst that got the whole thing going. In fact, when the ball was dropped a little bit later on, Ken was the fellow who picked it up and ran it right over to the **Hernandez Brothers** and got it going again.

MARTY: *"The ball was dropped." Can you elaborate on that?*

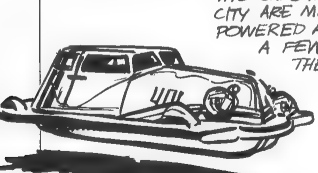
BILL: Well, **Paul Rivoche** is an incredibly talented artist. He demands absolute perfection from himself. He was doing brilliant work on MISTER X but wasn't particularly happy with the way he felt the storyline was going.

MARTY: *He had a disagreement then not with you but with Dean?*

BILL: They didn't seem to really have any personal disagreement; simply that Paul felt that Dean...as Paul did more and more work on MISTER X...despite the fact that nobody's ever seen any of it, Paul did vast amounts of work on MISTER X.

Dean Motter's MISTER X illo became one of Graphitti T-Shirts' best sellers.

"Paul did vast amounts of work on MISTER X."



He took the mere beginnings that he and Dean created and he explored all kinds of avenues under which MISTER X could be developed. He developed MISTER X really, to the point where you saw him by the **Hernandez Brothers.** Even if you just look at the four posters that we did you can see an evolution between the MISTER X you see on the first poster, and there's just a lot more mood and style coming into the second and the third posters that Paul did. The first poster was beautiful but it doesn't have the sort of mood that's exuded by the second two posters we did. And that was also demonstrated by the development work Paul was doing with the character while we were preparing to pencil the issue. Paul was pencilling the issue and at the same time further developing the character. One of the problems that he had was that he would develop the character past the point of the pages he had just pencilled, rendering the pages he had done beautiful but useless in the new context of the character.

MARTY: *So he was advancing past himself too fast?*

BILL: Yes. He was growing as an artist at a tremendous rate at that time, and he was, you know, just doing all of this work and getting very involved with MISTER X — to such a point where he began to, as they say, have difficulties with Dean's vision, because his own personal vision became so strong. And when his vision and Dean's began to collide and abrade, that's when I noticed things starting to fall apart. Paul was continuing to work on MISTER X but he wasn't happy with it anymore. Dean was having trouble communicating with Paul because Paul wasn't really happy with Dean's ideas. And what it ended up being is eight months after our original announced shipping date, you know — attempting one thing or another — it just became apparent that **Paul** was far too close to the project to ever complete it. He had done brilliant posters. He did some wonderful paintings that we later used for covers. He laid an incredible amount of groundwork from Dean's beginnings; and without the groundwork he laid MISTER X wouldn't be the tremendous concept that it is today.

MARTY: *In a sense you're complimenting Paul, but aren't you also saying that if you hadn't taken it away from him it may never have...*

Early character studies for MISTER X, the story of a genius who abandons his project shortly before completion, not unlike the story behind the story of MISTER X.

BILL: Paul never could have finished MISTER X, as I saw it. I just saw that Paul was getting more and more frustrated with it. He would not have finished MISTER X to his satisfaction, ever.

MARTY: *How did the day come that you...did you say to Ken, did Ken say to you, did somebody mention it to Dean...how did it happen that the Hernandez Brothers were brought in?*

BILL: Well, there were a couple of steps

"And the Hernandez Brothers said 'Yes'."

in between. At first it was going to be Dean and Paul. Then the whole thing was turned over to Paul. Paul was actually to write and draw the entire book. Then it became apparent that he was going to have personal difficulties with that as well, so I was forced into giving him an ultimatum. I said, "Please tell me now either you're going to have the book done by the date we're mentioning now, or if you don't I'll be forced to take some action; or you're free to quit the book right now and hopefully no hard feelings." Paul opted at that point to resign from the position of artist and writer of the book and we found ourselves with a promoted, publicized, well-received comic book with no art.

DEAN: That was much delayed.

BILL: Eight months delayed at this point. We went through a couple of weeks where we intended for Dean to actually write and draw the book. He was going to be, to a large extent, working from Paul's page breakdowns. Then Ken had the brainstorm to ask the **Hernandez Brothers**. Ken asked the **Hernandez Brothers** and they tentatively said yes. I went to California and spoke with them at length — prepared contracts — we signed them — and they were the new art team on MISTER X.

MARTY: *Why the Hernandez Brothers?*

BILL: We wanted people who were doing new, original, high-quality work in comics. We wanted people who had sensitivity. We wanted people who had respect for the medium. We wanted people who were doing things better than things that had come before

MARTY: *Dean, as the creator, did he have any input?*

BILL: Dean had a great deal of input in that he developed MISTER X with Paul. MISTER X, Walter Eichman, Radiant City, the passageways and the blueprints of the city, Reinhart and Myers, they were all taken from Dean's original concepts for the MISTER X storyline. The work that you saw in the four issues by the **Hernandez Brothers** was very much a synthesis of their own ideas and their own ways of storytelling meshed with the groundwork that Dean and Paul had provided them

MARTY: *So you flew down to California and made a deal with the Hernandez Brothers. This deal, was it unusual?*

BILL: Well, it was unique in that it wasn't really their creation — they did not create the characters and they did not create the premise — but theirs was to be the sole vision that would be communicated with the public. Nothing else had really been printed aside from the posters and the advertising. Consequently, I felt obligated

to give them royalties and payments on such things as merchandising and secondary rights and things of that nature.

MARTY: *Where does that stand now?*

BILL: Well, their contract has been terminated on a mutually agreed covenant between the two parties.

MARTY: *You paid them...*

BILL: Yeah, I gave 'em an undisclosed sum. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Are they. .*

BILL: No, in fact they still are owed money by Vortex Comics.

MARTY: *This is a fact?*

BILL: Yes, this is a fact. I don't dispute that one bit. And they'll be paid every nickle of it, or every quarter of it. *(Laughter.)*

DEAN: He has one quarter which he uses over and over.

BILL: Yeah, and I got two cases of Strohs in the back of my car as well. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Okay, so they accepted the book. Were they given deadlines? Were they given editorial direction?*

BILL: They had lengthy conversations with Dean and myself and they were sent a plot synopsis and model sheets and character outlines by Dean and Paul. They had some lengthy conversations with Paul as well. Paul was still involved with the project at this time as he was going to continue coloring the book. So they were given deadlines and I believe they met the deadline of the first issue. The issues obviously did not come out on a bi-monthly basis, but I never really got the feeling that they were dragging their heels or anything of that nature. Sometimes good art takes time to do.

MARTY: *Did you live with that?*

BILL: I was more than pleased with the progress they were making in doing the book.

MARTY: *Fine, but you were the publisher.*

BILL: Yes.

MARTY: *You were the one who put in the little indicia that the book was a bi-monthly.*

BILL: Right, and I am the one that has to answer those little query letters the National Library sends me asking me where the August 1986 issue is. *(Laughter.)* Well, obviously, I would prefer the book to come out on a regular schedule as it

"The underworld sex clubs that Dean

reflects badly upon Vortex Comics as an enterprise that we can't get a bi-monthly book to come out on a bi-monthly schedule. But, getting back to that kid in the art class, right, I always had real strong feelings for the artwork and I just could not bring myself to sacrifice the quality of a book simply for a regular publication schedule — as much as Bill the businessman wanted that regular publication schedule awfully bad.

MARTY: *Very magnanimous of you, but how did the fans feel?*

BILL: I basically felt that anybody that bought the book after waiting a year was willing to wait two and one-half months between issues. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *How did that sit with your distributors?*

BILL: There was a dramatic drop in orders from the time the original MISTER X was announced and solicited. We had sales on MISTER X #1 shipping August 1983 by **Dean Motter** and **Paul Rivoche** and exceeding 40,000 copies. MISTER X #1 shipped out at 26,000 copies.

MARTY: *That is significant.*

BILL: Yes. There's a number of factors. Obviously, people lose confidence in a book that takes a year to come out. And in the interim between the first time we solicited MISTER X and the second time we solicited MISTER X the notorious Black September happened, where there just was across the board a dramatic drop in everyone's orders on all of the books. Some people say it was due to a saturation of the marketplace by various members of the publishing community. I don't know if that's true or not but I certainly did notice a dramatic drop in my orders, not all of which could possibly be attributed to the change in artists considering that **Paul Rivoche** and **Dean Motter** are two pretty unknown quantities and at least by this time I can guarantee you every distributor knew who the **Hernandez Brothers** were.

DEAN: You would think so.

BILL: Yeah.

MARTY: *So, to put it bluntly, since you mentioned money and Black September and so forth, is Vortex making money?*

BILL: Vortex is currently in business publishing comics and servicing its debt. That, my accountant tells me, does mean I'm making money. Obviously, as anyone who saw the advance campaign on MISTER X will understand, I put a great deal of money into MISTER X before the first copy rolled off the presses.

MARTY: *And your studio has absolutely no financial input into…*

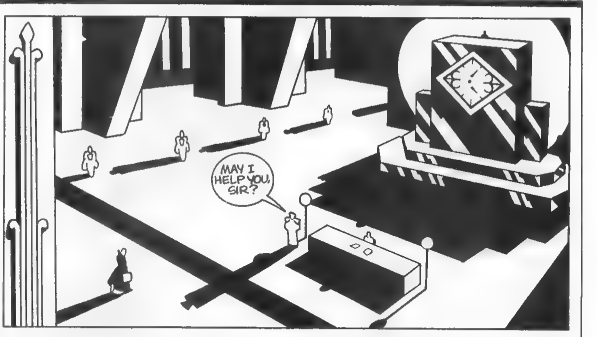
BILL: No. I arranged private investment into Vortex Comics Inc. that covered both the original promotional blitz and then I refinanced the company prior to the release of MISTER X #1 by the **Hernandez Brothers** for a secondary promotional blitz. The company makes money, as they say. When you finance something off that heavily you have a debt to service and your profits go towards servicing your debt before dividends are paid to your investors.

MARTY: *So the studio, Modern Imageworks, and Vortex Comics are…*

BILL: …completely separate entities. It was one of those things that, in doing business with Dean on MISTER X…we were sharing office space. Dean was going crazy trying to be an art director and a business manager of a studio at the same time. It was just one of those things where we would go out drinking and I would go, "What are you going to do about this.

Character sketch from KELVIN MACE #2.

hangs out in stuffing Boraxo up his nose."



Dean?" He'd go, "I don't know. I've got a couple of friends, one of whom might quit his job and go into partnership acting as my business manager." To this day, actually, those same two fellows are very close friends of ours, the same two chaps that we originally considered for this. But then one of them got a promotion, so he didn't quit his job 'cause all of a sudden he's making good money. He got a promotion at the record company he works for. The other one all of a sudden gets named creative director of the advertising agency he's working for. I'm going, "Well, who the hell's going to manage your company?" And Dean goes, "I don't know, Bill. What do you think of doing it?" I go, "You know, I might as well do it myself." *(Laughter.)* We're sitting in the Bamboo Club over about 20 beers, and it's me sitting there going, "Welllll, I guess I'd better manage it, Dean, 'cause nobody else is gonna do it." *(Laughter.)*

DEAN: Best 20 beers I ever bought. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: Last time he paid for anything. *(Laughter.)* Since then it's been a perfect working relationship. I have enough of a feeling for the artistic end of our business that I can appreciate where to leave Dean alone, and I have enough of a feeling for the business where I can appreciate where to tell Dean that he's completely wrong. Aside from that, Dean doesn't meddle with my end of the business and I don't meddle *too much* with his end of the business. We have what's considered, I think, a classic working partnership. We both know what we're doing. We both do it well. And we get along wonderfully.

MARTY: *Okay. What are you?*

BILL: I am the chief executive officer of Modern Imageworks Design Ltd.

MARTY: *And?*

BILL: And I am president of Vortex Comics Inc.

DEAN: Nice titles.

BILL: They are nice titles.

MARTY: *Does it pay well?*

BILL: Vortex Comics Inc. doesn't pay, period.

MARTY: *Doesn't pay who?*

BILL: Doesn't pay me. Uh, yeah, strike that last remark. *(Laughter.)*

DEAN: Company policy.

BILL: Company policy, yeah — Vortex Comics will not pay any bills. **Bill Marks**, that is... *(Laughter.)* Oh, no, we paid **Bill Sienkiewicz** so scratch that one, too. *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Has Ken Steacy been paid?*

BILL: Yes, in full.

MARTY: *Has Paul Rivoche been paid?*

BILL: Yes. **Paul Rivoche** and I reached a mutually satisfactory financial settlement.

MARTY: *And there are no more lawsuits as far as you know other than those pending?*

BILL: None pending that I know of — until this gets published; whoever I've libeled in this. *(Laughter.)* Well, you know, we should establish that before this interview was done we sat back here and sucked back a couple of cases of Strohs.

DEAN: Of Pepsi.

BILL: Yeah, a couple of cases of Pepsi. *(Laughter.)* And we're pretty loose-tongued by this time.

MARTY: *Canadian Pepsi has more sugar content than U.S. Pepsi.*

MARTY: *But getting back to MISTER X and Vortex Comics — financially, are you sound?*

BILL: Yes, absolutely. Vortex Comics pays the bills, pays off its debt, and is in the process of settling with anyone it owes money.

MARTY: *So there will definitely be more issues of MISTER X?*

BILL: MISTER X #9 is already drawn.

MARTY: *By whom?*

BILL: Seth.

MARTY: *What's a Seth?*

BILL: Good question. *(Laughter.)* Seth's this guy...

MARTY: *Describe this guy.*

BILL: He's just this guy, you know.

DEAN: I'm not sure we're allowed to describe Seth.

BILL: He's somewhere between five feet and seven feet tall. He's got hair...like in that **Talking Heads** song, "I've changed my hair so many times now, I don't know what I look like at all." He's got three passports. He's quite the chameleon.

MARTY: *Where did you find Seth?*

BILL: Well, you know, if you read the editorial in MISTER X #5 it describes the sleazy, underworld sex clubs that **Dean Motter** hangs out in stuffing Boraxo up his nose.

DEAN: In one nose and out the other. *(Laughter.)*

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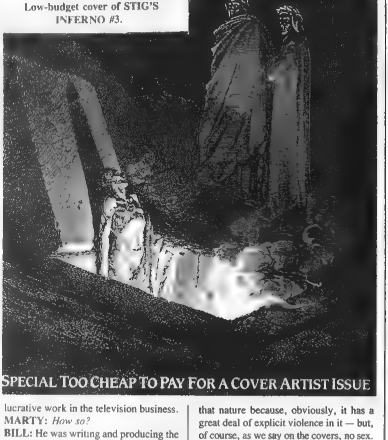
"I was quite nervous about POST BROS."

BILL: We didn't find Seth in one of those. In fact, I don't know where I found him. He just sprung full-blown from my brow.
DEAN: He submitted a story for VORTEX.
BILL: Actually, strangely enough, looking completely different from the way he looked the last time I saw him — Ken had just taken over — I guess it was maybe two years ago — when Ken had just taken over as editor of VORTEX — he showed Ken his portfolio and was given some words of pleasant encouragement and sent his merry way. He has since developed into a tremendous artist, doing work that is absolutely inspired. And he has a very strong feel for MISTER X and is doing a vision that is as unique and powerful as that of the **Hernandez Brothers**, and is as unique and powerful as that of Dean and Paul.
MARTY: *I've heard him described as MISTER X except for the baldness.*
BILL: Well, you know, there's a lot to be said for that. He's quite the character. As is the new inker on MISTER X, who is **Bill Diamond**, or **William Diamond** as he will be credited.
MARTY: *And what is his background?*
BILL: Well, punk rock bands, electrical wiring, mechanical drafting.
MARTY: *Has he been published?*
BILL: Not as a comic-book artist. Oh, there's also...I think he won the Judges Choice Award in the 1970 World Science Fiction Convention Art Show. That came as a complete surprise to me. We were just sitting around in another one of these bars. We were drinking beer and he was drinking Bailey's, and we discovered that as a younger man he had taken some of his more warped and twisted drawings to a science fiction convention and made lots of money selling them.
MARTY: *These people, employees of Vortex...*
BILL: ...make vast sums of money and travel the world.
MARTY: *I find that amazing. That's a lot of quarters.*
BILL: It's a lot of quarters — that's what they say.
MARTY: *What does your comic-book publishing empire consist of right now?*
BILL: Well, Ty's in Spain...
DEAN: I'm on my way to Jamaica.
BILL: I'm moving to Malta.
DEAN: It's an empire. It's around the world.
BILL: STIG'S INFERNO went through a hiatus partially due to Ty's Spanish escapades and partially due to the fact that **Ty Templeton** has recently been offered and has accepted a great deal of very lucrative work in the television business.
MARTY: *How so?*
BILL: He was writing and producing the all-night movie television program on Toronto's CITY-television, with notorious ex-rock'n'roller **Bob Segarini**. That particular show has since met its demise due to something they did on the air to a poor little innocent cat involving yogurt. *(Laughter.)* Ty is continuing to work in television and unfortunately has less time to devote to comics, so what we're currently seeing is that Ty is going to continue to do STIG'S INFERNO until such time as we can find a suitable artist for hum to collaborate on the book with, at which point Ty will continue to write it and gradually this new artist is going to take over the artistic chores on the book. THOSE ANNOYING POST BROTHERS continue to annoy...*(Laughter.)* ...and produce gratuitous violence in large quantities.
DEAN: For no particular reason.
BILL: No particular reason whatsoever.
MARTY: *No. For those type of people who enjoy it. That's what they're producing it for, right?*
BILL: That's...strangely enough, when I first heard about THOSE POST BROTHERS, had the idea presented to me, I was quite nervous about a book of that nature because, obviously, it has a great deal of explicit violence in it — but, of course, as we say on the covers, no sex. *(Laughter.)* But since I've been publishing it I've been forced to read all of the issues and have discovered that I really quite enjoy the book. *(Laughter.)*
MARTY: *A quote from the publisher: I've been forced to read my own books. That's really a shame, Bill. Are you saying, then, that you are publishing books that you did not read?*
BILL: No. I'm joking when I say that, quite honestly. I take a great interest in every book that we publish and would never let something go through that I hadn't at least read.
MARTY: *Okay, I'll accept that — but let's see what we have in print! (Laughter.) And what about VORTEX?*
BILL: Well, VORTEX has undergone a considerable hiatus due to the lack of an editor...
MARTY: *It's no longer bi-monthly?*
DEAN: It hasn't been for the past year. *(Laughter.)*
BILL: For the last six or seven months. VORTEX has a new editor and will be coming out. We're going to announce it on a quarterly schedule until we can see how this new team works out. The new editor on VORTEX is **Lou Stathis**,

Low-budget cover of STIG'S INFERNO #3.



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"...unless you live close to the edge."

former editor of HEAVY METAL magazine. I think what we're going to see in VORTEX is a very dramatic switch, not so much to the kind of material that's currently running in HEAVY METAL — because that's one of the reasons that he left — but more somewhere between CEREBUS and RAW.

MARTY: *There is a lot between those.*

BILL: Yeah. It's going to have a much more '80s feel. And I've got another good quote, too.

MARTY: *Ah, no, I don't want to hear any more. One a night.*

BILL: This is a good one. You'll like this one.

MARTY: *Oh, do I have to?*

BILL: Yeah. You can't see what's on the other side unless you live close to the edge.

MARTY: *That's a very good quote.*

BILL: Thank you. Throw that in... In fact, put that in one of those big boldface quotes across the top and people will scan the text to find out where it comes in and it isn't going to pertain to anything. *(Laughter.)* But it's a really provocative quote. It'll make people think that I'm a thoughtful and intelligent person.

MARTY: *It's a great quote. It sounds like you lifted it from Stiff Records. Okay, we know Bill Marks as a sweet, very kind, nice, unassuming, gentle, easy going...*

DEAN: I want to meet this **Bill Marks**. *(Laughter.)*

BILL: Just a swell guy, basically.

MARTY: *Yeah. We know Bill Marks as a swell guy. Why have you been so maligned in the press recently?*

BILL: Well, you see, really, the **Bill Marks** you know is a paid professional actor.

MARTY: *Good answer. Bill, why are you getting so much negative press?*

BILL: I don't really see that I'm getting a great deal of negative press.

MARTY: *Okay. Why is a certain publication...*

BILL: You're leading up to something, Marty. Tell me, what is it? I can't quite get what you're leading up to. *(Laughter.)* Obviously, there has been an article that casts some doubt upon the integrity and financial solvency of Vortex Comics. The article contains factual information. I have spoken with the fellow who wrote the article — since its publication — and, you know, told him that he certainly did present the facts but I felt they went on a bit. Yes, I owe the **Hernandez Brothers** some money. Yes, they have been paid every nickle they are contractually obligated at this time. Yes, I will be paying them in the future the rest of the money they are owed.

DEAN: That's nice.

BILL: Yes, I told them to have a lawyer look at the contract before they signed it. And yes, I do tend to drink a lot of beer and fall out of Volkswagons sometimes. *(Laughter.)* I did have a really good time in Italy.

MARTY: *So, just to recap, right now you're got THOSE ANNOYING POST BROTHERS...*

BILL: ...STIG'S INFERNO, KELVIN MACE, MISTER X, and VORTEX itself.

MARTY: *Five titles on a semi-regular basis.*

BILL: Yes.

MARTY: *In a given year how many issues will you publish?*

BILL: Of a bi-monthly we generally get about five and one-half issues out a year, 'cause what happens is you'll go four months and then you'll have two come out one after the other.

MARTY: *That's a general rule of thumb that on a bi-monthly you'll have five and one-half issues a year. I'm talking about Vortex.*

BILL: VORTEX the magazine or Vortex the company?

MARTY: *The company.*

BILL: STIG'S INFERNO will come out quite regularly. Ty is extremely reliable that way. MISTER X with the new team will be coming out right on time. As we said, we don't know about KELVIN MACE until we find out what it's like dealing with Austria. THOSE ANNOYING POST BROTHERS will be coming out quite promptly on a bi-monthly schedule.

MARTY: *And your dreams and aspirations as a young man, have they come to fruition?*

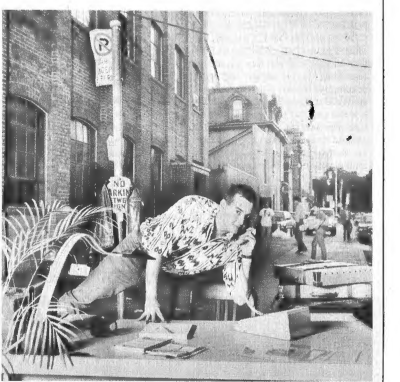
BILL: Well, there's still something I want to do with **Bianca Jagger.** *(Laughter.)*

MARTY: *Besides that. I meant in publishing.*

BILL: Oh, in publishing. Well, there's still something I want to do with **Bianca Jagger.** *(Laughter.)* Well, you know, I'm very pleased with MISTER X. I'm very pleased with the way the Vortex line has shaped up because it's a line of books all of which have their own integrity. There was an ad that came out recently in some of the comics published from First Comics saying that, "Oops, for the first time we've missed a deadline. We used to be able to guarantee you'd get your First comics 100% of the time and now you'll only get them 96.66% of the time."

MARTY: *Yes. What is the Vortex comeback?*

BILL: Vortex' answer to an ad like that is, "Vortex Comics, quality and integrity 100% of the time."



LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

BETCHA CAN'T READ JUST ONE: COMICS INTERVIEW CONVERT

Dear DAK and crew;

I have to admit that I bought issue #23 for ROBOTECH — but I ended up reading it cover to cover. That started the ball rolling, and I have been reading COMICS INTERVIEW ever since.

I am writing in response to the vicious attack by **Raymond Miller** on **Carl Macek** that appeared in the lettercol of #30. First off, **Mr. Miller**, you are being unreasonable. I seriously doubt your rationality and you seem to be paranoid. Did it ever possibly occur to you that the people who are buying up all of the Japanese Anime books and comics are doing so because they are genuinely interested in the medium? NO! It didn't because you rant and rave like they are just doing it to make you mad. They have the right! It is for sale, and they bought it, so don't be bitter.

Secondly, ROBOTECH is a breakthrough. It opened up the doors to Japanimation for hundreds of people. True, it's not great compared to the original series (MACROSS: THE SUPER DIMENSION FORTRESS; SOUTHERN CROSS: THE SUPER DIMENSION CAVALRY, and MOSPEADA: THE GENESIS CLIMBER) but there's no real way it could be, considering that the "intense" stuff had to be edited out (nudity, violence). In Japan, this is acceptable in certain quantities. But it would cause a lot of anger (to say the least) over here. Our society would find an unedited Japanese series to be unacceptable. Sad but true. People in crackpot organizations like The Moral Majority (and they are crackpots, to be sure) would find it "sinful" and "immoral." And as for the change in names of the characters and mecha, some of the changes are for the worse, but the names are used so infrequently that it doesn't bear getting upset.

Thirdly, and finally, if **Macek** wants to do something to ORGUSS or LUPIN, let him. The original series aren't too hot to begin with, so there is a good chance that any changes would be for the better. In my opinion, those two, along with THOSE OBNOXIOUS ALIENS, are the only blunders the Japanese have ever made. NAUSICAA AND THE VALLEY OF THE WIND (use its full name, please) was already translated into a very fine animated feature that won a major animation award.

Adam Baker
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NEW UNIVERSE: ONE GIGANTIC DUD

Dear DAK:

I owe **Archie Goodwin** a debt of gratitude and your interview with him in #36 is long overdue. I first began reading comics through the Warren magazines, CREEPY and EERIE. It was those early issues wherein Archie prolifically wrote nearly every story with a high degree of cleverness that really turned me on enough to try the other publishers, Marvel and DC.

Having stated that up front, I wish I could say his work on Marvel's much ballyhooed New Universe blow-out was outstanding. This is a pretty poor way to celebrate Marvel's 25th anniversary year, in my opinion. The new DRACULA graphic novel, the ELEKTRA series, BOZZ CHRONICLES and the DR. STRANGE graphic novel all are of a much higher entertainment quality than any of these eight New Universe bombardments. Some, in fact, are practically unreadable. Bad art, word balloons drowning out the pictures and a general air of forced contrivance all add up to one gigantic dud of a concept.

A few years ago I read only a handful of DCs with about five times as many Marvels; now I read about five times as many DCs with the number of Marvels staying about the same. Most of those belong to the rapidly dwindling Epic line where titles drop from sight as fast as lead balloons. Archie's efforts here have been admirable; with such low sales to go on, it's a wonder it's still extant at all.

What the discriminating comics lover needs now is not more shoot-'em-ups featuring mutant teams but more unique experimental stories like THE ONE, BOZZ CHRONICLES and ELEKTRA.

Gary Kimber
2100 Bathurst Street, Apt. 101
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M5N 2P2

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NEXT ISSUE: Imagine sitting down with the King of comics, JACK KIRBY, himself, for an informal chat in which he gets personal, talking about topics he's never before discussed in print, and opens his album for some unusual and unseen photos from the early years! It's a rare treat — *not to be missed!* Plus a bonanza of uncommon sense in part two of our interview with philosopher urchin BOB BURDEN! Lots more!

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